

**“WE ARE, WELL, IN A SHITTY SITUATION”**  
**Journalists' perceptions of the role and responsibility of the media**  
**in terrorism reporting**

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract <p>Terrorism reporting is a contradictory practice for the media: terrorist events are inherently newsworthy but disseminating information about attacks defined as terrorism also provides attention to perpetrators. Without a universal definition terrorism is a pejorative term that can be used for political effect. In public discussion, whether an act of violence should be defined terrorism or not is a common debate in the aftermath of an incident. While the interplay of terrorism and the media have been examined from various perspectives, less attention has been given to the journalistic and editorial practices that precede content.</p> <p>The aim of this thesis is to gain insight into how Finnish journalists perceive the roles and responsibilities of the media in terrorism reporting. The approach of the study is qualitative and empirical, and the thesis follows the discursive and social constructionist understandings of terrorism. The theoretical framework builds on literature about terrorism as a social construct, the interplay of terrorism and the media, critique on terrorism coverage and frames, framing as the interaction of journalists and sources, and the professional values and self-perceptions of journalists.</p> <p>The research material consists of 9 semi-structured interviews. Interviewees are Finnish journalists and editors that take part in terrorism reporting in national media. The interview material is analysed using qualitative content analysis. Based on a theory-bound analysis of the interviews, four roles and three areas of responsibility are designated for the media: the roles of the reporter, explainer, transmitter and analyser and responsibility for attention, context and balance. The findings of this thesis illuminate how journalists perceive the practical tasks, leeway and autonomy of the media in terrorism reporting. In addition, they explain previous findings about, for instance, the media's dependence on official sources, conventional frames and prevalent terrorism narratives.</p> <p>The roles and responsibilities indicate that the journalists perceive contextualising, independent reporting, confronting authorities and initiating discussion as important duties. However, these aspects are discussed conditionally, and during the early stages of reporting the media disseminate information and transmit official interpretations of events. A contradiction lies in how journalists value the status of the media as the public's source of information but find that circumstances preclude fixing issues identified in terrorism reporting. In sum, the journalists are aware of the issues but do not have the necessary means or mindset to tackle them. Journalists need sufficient knowledge about terrorism, initiatives to define the phenomenon more broadly and coherently, and guidelines to support practical work. The thesis concludes that approaches that hear out the actors in terrorism reporting are called for in order to deepen terrorism and media scholarship.</p>			
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>1.1 Funding .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>2 TERROR IN THE MEDIA.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>2.1 Terrorism as a contested term .....</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1.1 The definitional problem.....	5
2.1.2 Terrorism as a social construct.....	7
2.1.3 Terrorism as a political tool .....	8
<i>2.2 On the intersection of terrorism and the media .....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.2.1 Terrorism as news .....	9
2.2.2 Criticisms of terrorism coverage.....	12
2.2.3 Framing as interpreting terrorist events .....	14
<i>2.3 From analysing coverage to journalist perceptions .....</i>	<i>15</i>
2.3.1 Terror in the Finnish media.....	16
2.3.2 Frame-senders or frame-setters? .....	17
2.3.3 Professional values and self-understandings.....	19
<i>2.4 Conclusion of literature review.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<b>3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>3.1 Research problem and research questions .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>3.2 Interviews as research material.....</i>	<i>26</i>
3.2.1 The semi-structured interview .....	26
3.2.2 Overview of the interview process.....	27
<i>3.3 Qualitative content analysis of interviews .....</i>	<i>29</i>
3.3.1 Theory-bound analysis.....	30
3.3.2 Overview of the analysis process.....	31
<i>3.4 Limitations of the methodology.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<b>4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>4.1 Journalist perceptions of roles.....</i>	<i>35</i>
4.1.1 The reporter.....	36
4.1.2 The explainer.....	39
4.1.3 The transmitter .....	41
4.1.4 The analyser .....	44
<i>4.2 Journalist perceptions of responsibilities .....</i>	<i>48</i>

4.2.1 Attention.....	48
4.2.2 Context.....	52
4.2.3 Balance.....	54
4.3 <i>Summary and implications of findings</i> .....	58
4.3.1 The "shitty situation" of covering terrorism .....	59
4.3.2 Journalist self-perceptions about terrorism reporting .....	61
4.3.3 Improving journalistic practices.....	63
<b>5 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>67</b>
5.1 <i>Contributions of the study</i> .....	67
5.2 <i>Limitations of the study</i> .....	68
5.3 <i>Implications for further research</i> .....	69
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<i>Appendix 1 Interview frame .....</i>	78
<i>Appendix 2 Consent form.....</i>	80

# 1 INTRODUCTION

A stabbing, shooting, explosion or car crash? Or, perhaps, a terrorist attack? Deciding between these terms resembles one of the many journalistic deliberations that take place during the editorial process of terrorism reporting. What seems a simple choice of words is, in fact, a far more consequential practice. This is because instead of a neutral description terrorism is a controversial, politically charged label that transmits certain connotations about a violent incident (Norris, Kern & Just 2003). In both public discussion and academia, terrorism lacks a stable meaning. National legislations provide juridical definitions of terrorist crimes, but the contents of these definitions vary from country to country. Without a universal definition some scholars have refrained from using the term altogether, appealing to the impossibility to apply it systematically.

Simply put, an act of violence becomes terrorism only when it is classified as such (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018). This is not to say that terrorism as a phenomenon would not exist, but without shared rules it is the use of the term that determines what constitutes terrorism. This notion represents a discursive approach that views terrorism as a social construct. This thesis applies this approach, as the media represent an arena for public discussion and, therefore, for communicating and representing terrorism. For the public, the media are also an essential source of information about events of which they do not have first-hand experience. Despite definitional dilemmas, terrorism is a frequent topic for the media, as unpredictable, negative and violent events undeniably qualify as news. The political nature of the term explains why reporting about terrorism cannot be understood as an entirely neutral function even though, ideally, it pursues neutrality and factuality.

Extensive research about terrorism coverage illustrates the aspects that make terrorism reporting problematic. Consequently, many of the issues of terrorism reporting are tied to either the logic or functions of the media. Should terrorism be understood as a symbolic, communicative, attention-seeking strategy (see Schmid & de Graaf 1982; Nacos 2002), simply by reporting about terrorism the media transmit the perpetrators' deeds. Media representations and narratives influence public interpretations of terrorism (Freedman & Thussu 2011), which is why the media have been criticised for overrepresentations of terrorist threats, distorted perceptions of the scale of the phenomenon and unquestioned representations of official frameworks (Lewis 2011; Norris, Kern & Just 2003). Furthermore, in an age of shifting revenue models, globalisation and digitalisation, instead of selling prints news outlets compete for readers' limited attention online. A profession that

seeks unbiased, factual reports is obliged to provide content that sells. After the events of 9/11, the newsworthiness of terrorism has soared.

The idea for the topic of this thesis was sparked by events in the Finnish city of Turku in August 2017. The Finnish media were thrown for a loop as they faced events that were later titled the first terrorist attack on Finnish soil. The media response was an intriguing example of the interaction of journalists and their sources in a crisis situation. Until the police began to suspect a terrorist crime, the Finnish media were hesitant to call the attack terrorism (Jansson & Kuukkanen 2017; Paananen 2017; Safety Investigation Authority 2018, 53). Public debate about defining the event, the media response and political consequences interested me, initially, as a journalist reporting from Turku and, later, as a master's student in social sciences. The Finnish context raises questions related to the interests of this thesis. First, of the media's tendency to rely on official sources and, second, of the media's reaction to domestic and foreign events.

This thesis examines the interplay of terrorism and the media, a topic that has long been in the research interests of scholars. Previous research can be placed, among other fields, within political science, terrorism studies, journalism and media studies, international relations, and cultural studies, which advocates for the multidisciplinary nature of the research phenomenon. Despite decades of terrorism and media research, surprisingly little attention has been given to the media themselves: editorial processes and journalists. Media studies on terrorism or terrorism studies on the media provide a fairly extensive selection of media analysis in various national, historical and cultural contexts, be it representations, frames, discourses or narratives.

Journalists describe, explain and define the world to their readers, watchers and listeners, which presents the journalistic profession with power and responsibility. Framing studies illustrate how journalistic descriptions about terrorism are based on subjective choices that include, exclude and socially construct meanings. Consequently, framing studies have become a central doctrine of terrorism and media research (Epkins 2016, 262). Often attention centres around terrorism frames in the media and coverage by the media instead of the processes that precede the content. What happens in the newsroom in practice, how journalists perceive terrorism reporting and how they interact with sources are less researched areas that could provide explanations and elaborate the findings of previous research. When is it appropriate to call an event terrorism? Which sources do the journalists find valid? Are there guidelines for terrorism reporting?

Instead of analysing coverage, this thesis takes an actor-centered approach and follows Epkins' (2016, 265) call for "new avenues of research with terrorists and journalists themselves as primary sources." The thesis is situated at the intersection of journalism and media studies, political science and terrorism research. The aim of this study is to gain insight into how journalists perceive the interplay of terrorism and the media in general and their roles and responsibilities in terrorism reporting in particular. The thesis aims to answer the following research questions: How do journalists perceive the role and responsibility of the media in reporting terrorism? How do journalists describe the editorial process, and what kind of considerations influence journalistic decision-making?

The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on the understanding of terrorism as a social construct. The thesis follows a discursive perspective that seeks to examine how, why and by whom the term has been applied and used in public debate. This approach leaves behind attempts to settle upon an unambiguous definition of the phenomenon. The social construction of terrorism is intrinsically linked to the political nature of the term, which further justifies why the role and responsibility of the media is a valid topic of research. The media are not neutral observers but active participants. Moreover, the theoretical framework builds on research about the interplay of terrorism and the media. Approaching terrorism from a discursive perspective also requires an introduction to the study of framing and terrorism frames. Finally, a pivotal part of the theoretical framework is research on the professional norms and self-perceptions of journalists which addresses the journalists' understandings of their autonomy, function, role and responsibility.

The research material of this thesis is collected by interviewing Finnish journalists. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to comprehend how journalists understand the media's actions in terrorism reporting. The interview material is analysed using qualitative content analysis. As the purpose of this thesis is to understand how a sample of professionals observe, interpret and give meaning to certain phenomenon and behaviour, the research design is qualitative and empirical. Finland provides an interesting context for this study, because the country has rarely been the attraction of terrorism research. Within the Finnish public discussion, there has been reluctance to label domestic violence as terrorism (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018). Nonetheless, Finnish journalists are continuously faced with the need to cover foreign events and deliberate how they are transmitted to the public.

The academic relevance of this thesis lies in its research design. Instead of the commonly chosen approach that examines media content, this thesis provides a journalistic and editorial perspective. From a theoretical perspective, the aim of this thesis is to gain insight into how Finnish journalists perceive previously identified issues of the interplay of terrorism and the media and, consequently, offer a novel perspective to a long-standing research tradition. Ideally, the findings of this thesis help explain the ways the media has been found to report, define and frame terrorism. I hope that the findings complement existing theoretical understandings of terrorism reporting and diversify existing research perspectives. Even though the study takes place within a national context, it interacts with the wider trends within and existing knowledge of media and terrorism scholarship.

Above all, the findings of this thesis may raise concrete proposals to improve journalistic practices and are relevant for journalists and editors on the field. During individual incidents, definitions of the events, precautions and responses become a heated topic of public debate. Thus, the findings are also of societal value. The issues of terrorism reporting are not new, and as this thesis is underway, it has been several years since the Turku attack. The greatest peak of large-scale terrorist attacks in Europe has been deemed to have passed. Nevertheless, the concept of terrorism remains contested and novel debates, such as defining attacks with far-right motives, are all the more current.

After this introduction, the second chapter lays the theoretical basis for the research design of this thesis. The chapter reviews why terrorism is a contested concept and what this notion proposes. Following this definitional discussion, the chapter presents previous research on terrorism and the media and on professional journalistic values and self-understandings, highlighting relevant findings. The third chapter discusses the research question and research design of this thesis, justifies the chosen methods and describes the interview and analysis processes. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the analysis and discusses their indications and academic and practical value. The fifth chapter is the conclusion of this thesis that summarises key contributions, discusses limitations and gives suggestions for future research.

## **1.1 Funding**

The Foundation to Promote Journalistic Culture (known as JOKES, Journalistisen kulttuurin edistämissäätiö) has funded this thesis with a 900-euro student grant. The foundation has not influenced the choice of the thesis topic nor the design or emphasis of the research.



## **2 TERROR IN THE MEDIA**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of this thesis and the foundations for its research design. In the first section, I describe the definitional dispute behind the concept of terrorism and its implications for this thesis. Second, I review previous research about the interplay of terrorism and the media and terrorism coverage and highlight relevant findings. Third, I orientate the reader towards the approach of this thesis by discussing the Finnish context, professional values and self-understandings of journalists, and a gap in research.

### **2.1 Terrorism as a contested term**

“We know terrorism when we see it” is a statement that summarises how the term terrorism provides a definitional framework for countless incidents, even though no single definition encompasses all of these uses (Millington 2018, 1). This section is an overview of the definitional elements that scholars agree or disagree on. I present explanations for the lack of a universal definition and justify the discursive and social constructionist understanding of terrorism that this thesis follows. I also discuss the political use of the term.

#### **2.1.1 The definitional problem**

A long-standing debate about the definitions of terrorism has taken place from academic research to legislation. Researchers trace the appearance of terrorism as a research subject to the late 1960s and early 1970s (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 777; Reid 1997, 96). Within the academic domain, a manifold selection of incidents and forms of violence have been studied as terrorism (Millington 2018, 1). In the 1980s, scholarly questionnaires produced 109 separate definitions of terrorism, which illustrates the contested nature of the phenomenon (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 780).

The definitional elements that scholars mostly agree on include identifying terrorism as a “method of combat or a tactic”, “involving a threat of force and violence” and “a political purpose” (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 782). The pursuit of publicity was not as prominent as other elements but was recognised as part of the definition. However, the most remarkable differences concern two of these elements, as some academic terrorism journals completely omit

either threat or tactics from terrorism definitions. Freedman and Thussu (2011, 19) note that often the subjects and objects of terrorism are either entirely forgotten from definitions or are at the core of the dispute. Furthermore, the usage of the term terrorism has changed greatly over time (Nacos 2002, 17). It is suspected that the temporal context affects how scholars define terrorism, as definitions have tended to speak to the concerns of the present (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 785; Millington 2018, 2). In other words, terrorism is defined based on observations of current events, actions, perpetrators and methods. Terrorism of the 2020s would differ from terrorism of the 1980s.

Despite the tradition of terrorism research, attempts to arrive at a universal definition have failed to the extent that Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler (2004, 777) describe terrorism as an *essentially contested concept*. Originally coined by W. B. Gallie (1956, 168), essentially contested concepts are used in such myriad ways that a standard cannot be clearly defined. The existence of the concept is not contested. Instead, its proper use is under constant dispute. Although different uses of the concept are sustained by respectable arguments, no general method exists that could decide between rival claims (Gallie 1956, 169, 179). In addition, those who use the concept are aware of the competing views and to some degree appreciate “the different criteria in the light of which other parties claim to be applying the concept in question” (Gallie 1956, 172).

Based on Gallie’s work, Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler (2004, 778–779) link terrorism’s contested nature to problems of borders, membership, stretching and traveling. Border and membership problems point at a fine line between different forms of political violence and a lack of congruence in describing some of these forms as terrorism and others as something else. A certain type of act is labelled terrorism on one occasion but as something else on other occasions. Stretching and traveling problems refer to either geographic or psychological distance that seems to affect what researchers identify as terrorism. According to Weinberg et al., political violence is typically given a more neutral title if the act takes place a social or physical distance away rather than in a domestic setting.

A juridical understanding of terrorism relies on legal definitions that seek to determine whether a crime was conducted with terrorist intent. In public discussion, these legal definitions are often relied upon when the nature of an act is debated. However, even among national criminal laws, no universal definition exists, and legal understandings of terrorism differ nationally (Simeon 2019, 2–3). Some scholars refrain from using the term altogether, and the idea of terrorism has been

criticised for its ability to change the subject from victim to perpetrator (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 787). This refers to an understanding that perpetrators are motivated by, for instance, oppression they have faced. In an example situation, calling a state-oppressed group terrorist diminishes the discrimination it has faced and, instead, only stresses the wrongdoings of the group. The relatively open rules for the application of the term suggest that its use determines what is understood to constitute terrorism.

### **2.1.2 Terrorism as a social construct**

Analysing terrorism as a concept that is used in practice by various social actors is not to deny that terrorism exists but to say that what counts as terrorism has to be represented and communicated for it to exist. (Stump & Dixit 2011, 212)

The emergence of the discourse of terror has been traced to the eighteenth century French revolutionary era (Blain 2005, 10). The early use of the term tied terrorism with violent actions by the state and from above, aimed at real or perceived enemies (Nacos 2002, 17). Here, discourse refers to how and why the term terrorism is used. A discursive understanding of terrorism is based on the notion that these discourses give meaning to the phenomenon (Ditrych 2014; Millington 2018, 3). As Malkki and Sallamaa (2018, 863) put it: “No incident is inherently an act of terrorism but only becomes one when the claim of its terrorist nature is successfully made.”

Schmid (1992) divides terrorism discourse into four arenas: Within the academic arena, scholars attempt to find a useful and shared definition. The arena of the state consists of statements, laws, judicial rulings and regulations and rather broad and vague definitions. The public arena reflects the media’s use and interpretation of the concept (see also Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 779). Last, the arena of perpetrators and sympathisers focuses on the political objectives instead of the deeds. Schmid’s division demonstrates that the discursive debate about terrorism takes place on several arenas which interact and influence one another. Without a commonly accepted framework of the elements that constitute a terrorist act, the discourses of terrorism remain unfixed and subject to national and international influences (Freedman & Thussu 2011, 19).

Instead of determining the key characteristics of terrorism, this thesis concentrates on the use of the concept, the processes in which it is socially constructed and the actors that take part in its construction. Approaching terrorism as a socially constructed phenomenon is necessary for this

thesis because the media provide an arena for defining and debating terrorism. Within this arena, different actors use the term and their representations transmit certain perceptions and judgments. In media anthropology, the media are considered a shared, symbolic system which builds, organises and shapes the surrounding reality. Media performances, production and reception construct both the symbolic and social reality (Sumiala 2010, 13, 46). The social constructionist approach guides this thesis towards an analysis of “the use of the term in its context, the meanings and representations it signifies, and the contest over its application as a label” (Millington 2018, 7).

Historically, the term terrorism has been used to convey disapproval and reach a political effect, which increases the ambiguity of the term (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004, 778). The discourse of terrorism is synonymous with abnormality, extremism and irrationality, which is why calling one’s political opponents terrorists has functioned as a tactic in power struggles (Blain 2005, 13). Whether one describes a group as freedom fighters or as terrorists takes a clear political stance. Using the term for political effect is a form of socially constructing the terrorist phenomenon.

### **2.1.3 Terrorism as a political tool**

The political use of the term terrorism is linked to the difficulty in settling on a commonly acknowledged definition. Instead of a neutral description, terrorism is a pejorative label that communicates judgment or condemnation (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 863). This is based on the political benefits of using the term: it evokes certain narratives and connotations and carries strong normative overtones (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 6). The power of the term is largely rhetorical (Blain 2005, 5). Its use depoliticises the attack and delegitimises the attacker, in other words detaches an act from its context and minimises the need for political or societal analysis (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 876; Millington 2018, 2). The political use of the term relies on a framework of current ideas, values and meanings that are associated with the term (Millington 2018, 3). The negative connotations of the term make it easy to condemn an act without needing to discuss the political objectives of the perpetrators. For instance, by labelling a rebel or opposition group as terrorist, a state dismisses the political grievances that lie behind.

It has been hypothesised that people are more likely to describe those considered as outsiders terrorist rather than those they identify with (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 865). Malkki and Sallamaa link this tendency especially to media reporting but note that the hypothesis lacks wider academic testing. Freedman and Thussu (2011, 20) argue that definitions of terrorist acts are driven not by

“the nature of the deeds” but by “the identity of the perpetrators”, such as their religion or ethnicity. The authors take post 9/11 notions of terrorism as an example of how defining an act as terrorism is used to justify violent reactions and responses. Presenting terrorism as fanatical and random brutality against democratic states rationalises its illegitimacy and entitles a counterterrorism response. Freedman and Thussu refer to the US invasion of Iraq which was justified as a war against terrorism.

The political nature of the term explains why it is not an entirely neutral function to define or frame acts as terrorism in the media. The discursive, social constructionist approach of this thesis is based on the notion that terrorism becomes defined as it is represented and communicated. The media are both an arena for these representations and actors that communicate terrorism.

## **2.2 On the intersection of terrorism and the media**

Scholarly work across academic fields has explored the intersections of terrorism and the media since the early 1970s (Robinson, Seib & Fröhlich 2016, 1; Conway 2012, 447). These fields include political science, communications, journalism and media studies, cultural studies, international relations, sociology and psychology. During the 1970s, both the number of academic articles on terrorism and the attention given to the topic by the media increased greatly (Miller & Mills 2009, 415). In the media, terrorism coverage increased roughly fourfold. A similar peak in the production of academic work and media coverage has taken place after 9/11. In this section, I review relevant literature from this body of research and present key findings.

### **2.2.1 Terrorism as news**

Should terrorism be regarded as theatre? Do terrorists hijack or weaponise the media? Are the media the terrorists’ best friend or are the two simply co-dependent, to the extent that some end up calling media coverage words of mass destruction? These questions are examples of the scholarly reflections about the interplay of terrorism and the media. Epkins (2016, 257) summarises that these scholarly descriptions follow a shared narrative: “Headlines equal power.” This narrative refers to the publicity and impact that headlines provide to perpetrators. However, it can also be interpreted to refer to the journalists’ ability to make independent editorial decisions. Overall, the questions highlight how the research area has centred upon media criticism. A careful study of previous

research indicates that media logic, technology and practices make terrorism and the media intersect. In the following, I discuss three intersections that I have identified from this body of research.

The first intersection is terrorism as news. Terrorist events are inherently newsworthy, which makes them a major topic in media coverage. Events that are labelled terrorist feature qualities that correspond to most definitions of news value, such as violence, conflict, drama, a threat to public safety and an ability to become noticed on the political agenda (Lewis 2011, 231). According to Lewis (2011, 230), terrorism entails the ingredients that make great news and, therefore, provides a particularly powerful story for the media.

The second intersection rests on the communicative features of terrorism that are particularly relevant in the era of digital media technologies. The understanding of terrorism as communication is based on the idea that the immediate targets and victims of violence are not the actual target of political objectives. Instead, the aim is to terrorise a wider group. Schmid and de Graaf (1982) are renowned for highlighting these symbolic aspects of terror. They have suggested that terrorism is a violent communication strategy, as the act of violence sends a political message to various audiences. The re-circulation of the original event is central to this aim. In other words, the

[...] immediate victim is merely instrumental, the skin of the drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience. As such, an act of terrorism is in reality an act of communication. For the terrorist, the message matters, not the victim. (Schmid & de Graaf 1982, 14)

The third intersection is founded on the premise that terrorism functions by attracting attention (Huff & Kertzer 2018, 55). It raises questions of whether or to what degree the media aid terrorists in publicising their messaging and terrorists aid the media with providing a story that tempts readers (Epkins 2016, 255). Simply by providing their readers with information about what is happening in the world, the media serve as transmitters of terrorist deeds and objectives. According to Nacos (2000, 174), publicity has been a central goal of most terrorists throughout history, and advances in communication customs and technologies have enhanced terrorists' propaganda capabilities. As advances, Nacos refers to shifts from word-to-mouth storytelling to news reporting in the print press, radio and television and later the internet.

Nacos (2002, 3) has coined the term mass-mediated terrorism, which refers to a perpetrator's deliberate drive for publicity and the mass media as the facilitator of such attention. Violent acts are specifically planned with the logic of the media in mind. Perpetrators aim to achieve their ultimate goals by intimidating the general public, specific groups or government officials through the media. Nacos' concept is similar to the idea of mediatisation, a process that highlights the increasing importance of the media as a key institution in the society (Sumiala 2010, 112). The mediatisation of terrorism means that terrorists adapt their operations to the logic of the media and use the existing media system to pursue their purposes (Sumiala 2010, 125). Nacos' (2002) definition links the third intersection to the second. Terrorism is again treated as a strategy: those who commit political violence are aware of the ability of their actions to win media attention.

However, the question of publicity has raised some friction among scholars, because not all scholars regard publicity as a central feature of terrorism (Nacos 2000, 175). Nacos confines her definition of mass-mediated terrorism to non-state actors, whereas Picard (1993), among others, considers the state a potential perpetrator. From this point of view, all acts of terrorism do not aim to receive extensive media coverage. To the contrary, many forms of state violence are purposely kept secret. If they were revealed by the media, the goal of repressing or controlling citizens would be hampered (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 9). In spite of this, Picard (1993, 6) accepts that the media are modern tools for terrorists, as the news media magnify the size of an audience for a terrorist act. In Picard's view, the media are not essential for terrorists but a potential instrument.

The three intersections lead to propositions that terrorism and the media are in a symbiotic relationship: terrorists receive attention to communicate their grievances through violent acts, and the media receive striking news. Present-day communication technology allows live transmissions and nonstop reports even from remote locations. Therefore, critics blame the media for "rewarding terrorist acts with disproportionate coverage" that makes "terrorists resort to progressively bloodier violence to satisfy the media's appetite for shocking news" (Nacos 2000, 175). The notion of a symbiosis has become close to a common perception in discussions of terrorism and the media (Iqbal 2017, 465). In a case study, Iqbal (2017) tested the level of a suggested symbiosis during specific news events by assessing the nature of terrorism coverage in relation to the site of the incident and the location of the media.

In his analysis of British media coverage of the London attacks in 2005 and the Mumbai attacks in 2008, Iqbal (2017, 450, 463) found that if an attack took place 'close to home' the media were less

likely to focus on awe and terror in a dramatic fashion and more likely to emphasise perpetrators responsible for the attacks, national harmony and the emergency response. The style of terrorism coverage changed when events took place in the base country of the media organisation, and events far away were more likely given disproportionate coverage. According to Iqbal (2017, 465), the findings show that the notion of a symbiotic relationship, in terms of disseminating information, is not static and not necessarily accurate at all occasions and locations. Even though these findings are from a national case study, they suggest that the question of a symbiosis is not straightforward.

I have identified and reviewed the intersections of terrorism and the media to highlight the factors that make the interplay of terrorism and the media problematic. Whether or not an active accomplice, the media provide a platform through which a political message can be amplified. Yet, not covering terrorism would stand against news values and, therefore, the logic of the media.

### **2.2.2 Criticisms of terrorism coverage**

The previous section answered the question *why* the media cover terrorism. This section answers the question *how* the media cover terrorism. The media constitute an important source of information about distant places, people and events and inform individuals about topics they have little first-hand experience of (Moernaut, Mast & Pauwels 2018, 1311). A majority of individuals learn about events labelled as terrorism through media consumption, especially if they reside outside the immediate vicinity of the acts (Conway 2012, 445). Therefore, it matters how the media report about terrorism. Acts labelled as terrorist gain significant media attention and, thus, climb high on the political agenda. These features assign media researchers with several research issues that deal with the professionalism, ethics and responsibility of journalists, editors and media managers (Vartanova & Smirnova 2011, 167).

For Vartanova and Smirnova (2011, 171), journalists' difficulties in covering terrorism ascribe to the conflicting objectives of the coverage. First, journalists need to consider competing positions, values, experiences and interests. Second, they strive for objectivity, social responsibility, freedom of expression and information security but simultaneously need to protect audiences from harmful psychological impact. In the same vein, Epkins (2016, 257) states that covering terrorism "seems like an impossible predicament." The media need to objectively hear out the victims and the perpetrators of an attack, all the while assessing their own involvement in transmitting propaganda or enacting the events in their representations.



Academic interest towards terrorism existed long before 9/11, but the attack in New York has been regarded as a turning point. Scholars have called the events a catalyst that elevated international terrorism to a new level within public discussion and the media, resulting in overrepresentations of terrorist threats and distorted perceptions of the scale of the terrorist phenomenon (Lewis 2011, 231; Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 3, 4). Simply put, the scale with which terrorism was discussed and reported did not correspond to its actual scale or threat. While other global trends, such as climate change, undoubtedly pose a greater risk to the future of humanity as a whole, terrorism coverage commands the attention of publics (Lewis 2011, 230). Nacos (2000, 176) links the “dramatic, shocking and tragic human-interest aspects” of terrorist acts to the overrepresentation of such events in the media. Consequently, Lewis (2011, 258) proposes that 9/11 formed a framework through which stories about terrorism would be told in the twenty-first century.

An example of this framework is the post 9/11 narrative of ‘war on terror’. Through this narrative, the media constructed and maintained a global story that is based on Western geopolitical concerns (Freedman and Thussu 2011, 14–15). US officials posed international terrorism as the main threat for national security which transmitted to media narratives. Thus, the events of 9/11 shifted the predominant news frame that the American media used for understanding national security threats (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 3–4). The media influence public interpretations of terrorism through narratives and representations, more specifically the language the media use (Freedman & Thussu 2011, 18–19; Huff & Kertzer 2018, 56). This is arguably why a great deal of attention within previous research has been given to the ‘war on terror’ narrative. The narrative raises a question of whether media coverage sides with governments and overly relies upon official interpretive frameworks (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 3).

Up until the present day, the ‘war on terror’ discourses have also been influential in how the meaning of terrorism is understood (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 862). Current terrorism discourse associates the phenomenon with Salafi-jihadism, which excludes various other groups and, for instance, so-called lone wolves (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 846). Especially considering the Anglo-American public discussion, scholars have noted double standards with which the terrorist label is applied and Islamic connotations of terrorism narratives (Huff & Kertzer 2018; Freedman & Thussu 2011). The double standard refers to a greater likelihood to adopt a terror frame if the perpetrator is Muslim, whereas other perpetrators are framed in relation to, for instance, mental health and personal issues (Huff & Kertzer 2018, 55; Freedman and Thussu 2011, 18–19). Even though news values are regarded rather universal and prevalent, not all attacks linked to political violence

become salient news (Liebes and First 2003, 59; Nacos 2002, 4). Instead, it is also the historical and political context that determines some forms of political violence as newsworthy over others (Lewis 2011, 234). For Lewis, this explains two issues. First, the Western tendency to assume that the roots of terrorism are inscribed in the religion of Islam. Second, why far-right political violence remains absent from the dominant terrorism news narrative despite evidence of its growing amplitude.

De la Brosse and Holt (2019) summarise the dilemmas that terrorism coverage entails: terrorism's effects on media coverage, the media's role in the strategy of terror, the professional autonomy of journalists, possible control of other actors, and the media's influence on public perceptions of terrorism. Most of the scholarly work on terrorism coverage in the media has considered the outputs of a complex editorial process. To deepen the perspective of terrorism reporting, the next section considers the practices that take place before content is published.

### **2.2.3 Framing as interpreting terrorist events**

Mass communication is frequently examined through framing, and easy access to databases of press coverage has made frame analysis an attractive approach to study terrorism coverage (Conway 2012, 447; Epkins 2016, 262). The concept of framing points to the way journalists describe, explain and define the world to their readers, watchers and listeners. This practice presents the journalistic profession with both power and responsibility. Instead of external intermediaries of terrorist incidents, Freedman and Thussu (2011, 21) maintain that the media are "crucial ideological vehicles in systematizing and organizing disparate 'acts of terror'" and should, therefore, be regarded "active agents in the actual conceptualization of terrorist events." By ideological vehicles, Freedman and Thussu imply that the way the media choose to frame and represent terrorism constructs and naturalises meanings that are generally understood to constitute the phenomenon.

Framing theory examines the news production process, in which selection, emphasis and exclusion result in a comprehensible interpretation of events (Norris, Kern & Just 2003; Gitlin 1980; Goffman 1986). Journalists make editorial decisions that highlight parts and leave others out, which is why their actions are not neutral or passive (Nacos 2002, 11). They prioritise some factors over others based on common ways of interpreting events and choose perspectives from various alternatives, which also highlights that there is no single way of formulating news (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 10–11). The media evaluate which sources qualify as credible, which messages to transmit from these sources, how to communicate these messages and within which context to deliver them. This

practice constitutes a framework used to define conflicts and transmit information about them (Freeman & Thussu 2011, 24). The social reality and its prevailing attitudes towards terrorism affect how the media represent, contextualise and explain terrorism. Norris, Kern & Just (2003, 14) discuss conventional news frames which enable consistency, predictability and simplicity:

Out of the myriad ways of describing events in the world, journalists rely upon familiar news frames and upon interpretations of events offered by credible sources to convey dominant meanings, make sense of the facts, focus the headlines, and structure the story line. The way journalists observe and report terrorist events is shaped by how similar events have been covered in the past and by the reporters' most trusted sources of information. (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 4)

Frames give both the journalists and the public tools to understand what is going on, as they help explain novel and complex situations, causes, effects and solutions (Boesman et al. 2017, 305). Choosing a frame is a result of a preliminary definition of what has happened and how the events should be situated within their social, historical and cultural context. The study of framing highlights the media's role and responsibility in the process of terrorism reporting, as it reveals subjective choices within a seemingly objective practice. Terrorism frames should not be understood as the sole determiner of the public's perceptions of terrorism. However, framing theory suggests that frames have a central role in influencing public opinion and shaping public reactions (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 13). Framing addresses the journalistic processes of inclusion and exclusion and the various actors at play when a concept is socially constructed in public discussion. Therefore, it explains both the intermediary and active role of the media.

## **2.3 From analysing coverage to journalist perceptions**

Few events have been discussed or defined as terrorism in Finland. This does not mean that the Finnish media would not report about terrorism. To the contrary, especially over the last decades Finnish journalists have regularly faced the need to report about violent incidents in Europe and elsewhere. In this section, I underlay the research design of this thesis by examining public discussion about terrorism in the Finnish context, framing as the interaction of journalists and sources, and previous findings about Finnish and foreign journalists' understandings of values, ethics and reporting about so-called man-made catastrophes.

### **2.3.1 Terror in the Finnish media**

Malkki and Sallamaa (2018, 863) describe the Finnish context as follows: “Finland is among the countries with the smallest number of terrorist attacks recorded in the Global Terrorism Database. The apparent absence of terrorism does not, however, imply that Finland would lack a terrorism debate.” To the contrary, Malkki and Sallamaa’s study of the use of the term terrorism in Finnish public debate suggests that the political nature of the term is visible. The authors analysed how acts of presumably ideologically motivated violence between 1991 and 2015 were treated within media coverage and public statements.

In this century alone, several deaths and nearly 200 injuries have been reported in Finland on account of symbolic and indiscriminate violence. Even though elements of these acts align with understandings of terrorism, none were labelled as such in Finnish public discussion (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 863). Instead, there was a considerable reluctance to call domestic actors terrorist. Malkki and Sallamaa’s (2018, 865, 871) findings resonate with several other studies and suggest that the connotations of the term terrorism in Finnish public debate coincide with other national contexts, such as the US and the UK. A hesitance to describe domestic events terrorist is not to say that foreign events would not be reported as terrorism in the Finnish media. Malkki and Sallamaa note that in the present media environment, the boundaries between domestic and international media are blurred. In contrast to the treatment of domestic events, other studies from the Finnish context show that within media coverage and public statements the concept of terrorism is “broadly and without hesitation” applied to attacks outside Finland, especially ones that suggest a Salafi-jihadist agenda (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018, 866).

By the end of 2018, The Global Terrorism Database had reported 21 incidents in Finland that fit the database’s definition of terrorism or an attempt of terrorism (The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2019). These incidents include one of the two school shootings in Finland, the Jokela school shooting in November 2007, which was not publicly defined as terrorism according to Malkki and Sallamaa’s (2018) study. The timespan of Malkki and Sallamaa’s analysis does not encase the Turku stabbings in August 2017, an event treated as the first terrorism-related attack in Finland (Rosendahl & Forsell 2017). In June 2018, the Finnish District Court found the attacker guilty and decreed the crime terrorist (Yle 2018). Although often referred to as the Turku stabbings or the Turku attack in the media, Finnish media have also called the events a terror attack.

A scant number of domestic events have been defined as terrorism in Finland, which may explain the lack of scholarly attention to terrorism coverage in the Finnish context. Media-related terrorism research or terrorism-related media research can mostly be found among theses. The topics range from the threat of terrorism constructed by a national newspaper (Heinonen 2018), Finnish media discussion about terrorism and terrorism-related threats constructed by the media (Rännäli 2017), Finnish media portrayals of homegrown terrorism's causal dynamics (Sallamaa 2014), and the use of the term international terrorism in a national newspaper's opinion pieces (Salmela 2010). One thesis compared Saudi-Arabian, American and Finnish news coverage of Isis (Laine 2017). Malkki, Fridlund and Sallamaa (2018, 769) call for studies in the Nordic context that give attention to how the term terrorism is used. This thesis aims to answer this call, which is why the last sections of this chapter lay the final foundations for such an approach.

### **2.3.2 Frame-senders or frame-setters?**

Moernaut, Mast & Pauwels (2018, 1311) argue that a focus on frames found in media texts overlooks factors that influence framing. Compared to discovering and analysing frames in media content, how these frames come to being is a far less explored research area (Brüggermann 2014, 62). This section presents previous research about framing as a process and as the interaction of different actors. Besides the media, the public uses frames to make sense of events and political leaders use them to respond to events and justify policies (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 11). Within the broader social context of a society, news frames are shaped by the basic facts of events, interpretations of the events by officials, and the demands of dissidents in the form of manifestoes or press statements (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 12–13). Some basic facts, such as timing, are relatively neutral and unquestioned, but most elements, such as language, choice of sources and interviewees, and imagery, can be contested.

Boesman et al. (2017, 298–299) point out that framing new events does not take place in a vacuum but stems from familiar frames about related events, journalistic routines and interaction between journalists and external sources. However, journalists may not be aware of the external factors that influence their work. Norris, Kern and Just (2003, 14) note that conventional frames may become so prevalent that their transition to media coverage happens unconsciously: “Where conventional frames become pervasive within a particular news culture, journalists may well believe themselves

to be reporting ‘just the facts’ in the tradition of objective and balanced reporting, as they are unaware of the way that the broader frame shapes their story narratives.”

Studies demonstrate that the prevalence of particular frames is connected to the use of specific sources (Boesman et al. 2017). However, external frames transmit to news coverage to varying degrees. Brüggermann (2014) distinguishes between *frame-sending* and *frame-setting*, two separate ends of a continuum of journalist–source interaction. As frame-senders, journalists depend on sources and to some extent transmit their interpretations and agenda. As frame-setters, journalists take more responsibility for frame selection, depend less on source-suggested frames and frame coverage more in line with their personal interpretations of the issue (Brüggermann 2014, 64). In the same vein, Van Gorp (2007, 68) differentiates between framing through the media and framing by the media. Brüggermann’s (2014, 62) continuum shows the variation in the degree of what he calls journalistic intervention. In addition to professional news criteria, value judgments by journalists contribute to journalistic routines.

The process of framing commences when journalists deem an event newsworthy. It is followed by a definition phase in which the role of sources increases. During this phase, different stakeholders push their viewpoint as the most suitable frame for a given issue (Boesman et al. 2017, 299). Sources become a significant part of the news production process especially during violent crisis and conflict. External sources, such as eyewitness accounts, official statements and interviews compose most of the input for news content, but journalists structure this content and decide which views to accept (Moernaut, Mast & Pauwels 2018, 1323).

Sources are used to structure and shape the story but also to add credibility to truth claims (Gonen 2018, 1). Moernaut, Mast and Pauwels (2018, 1324) describe quoting as a strategic ritual that “provides a veil of objectivity.” In practice, a journalist may believe something to be a fact but needs to quote a source to legitimise this belief. Nacos (2002, 16) states that the media have a tendency to rely on preconceived labels by state officials because of their uncertainty to call political violence terrorism. This, in turn, is the result of their awareness of the negative connotations and dissenting views that the term terrorism carries.

As an example of the influence of official sources, Miller and Rizwaar (2011) suggest that the British government’s over-emphasis on Islamist terrorism translated to the press, impacted media reporting and influenced the media agenda. They found that British government pronouncements

were dominated by Islamist terrorism instead of other terrorist-related activities, such as actions by armed groups in Northern Ireland (Miller & Rizwaar 2011, 85–86). This was the case even though Jihadist attacks accounted for 0.5 per cent of political violence in the UK in a total of four years. These findings are in line with Gonen's (2018, 9) description of the prominence of official sources:

[E]ven though journalists introduce critical voices into the conflict [...] it seems that official sourcing practices still prevail at the cost of other sources. Journalists rely most on elite sources, like political statements and expert opinion, and add citizen voices to give the conflict issues a more "human" face or just support their interpretation of events. Thus, the authoritative voices in the society maintain some control on the flow on information, at least through traditional media channels.

Studies suggest that increasing complexities in the power dynamics between journalists and sources give sources better abilities to enter and influence the news in unclear situations (Gonen 2018, 8). Growing deadline pressure has also been hypothesised to make journalists increasingly dependent on official sources (Boesman et al. 2017, 299). Indeed, journalism and communication studies have shown that the autonomy of newsroom work is usually overestimated and the position of the public and the media is frequently subservient to official positions and other internal and external determinants (Robinson, Seib and Fröhlich 2016, 2). Brown (2003, 55) posits that governments, militaries and the media are interdependent in times of conflict. The media need sources and information, and governments and militaries seek to shape media representations. The media's dependence on the system of expert and official institutions is linked to the journalistic commitment to transmit objective facts (Koljonen 2013, 142).

### **2.3.3 Professional values and self-understandings**

The interplay of terrorism and the media raises at least two types of ethical issues that journalists need to take into account. The first issue refers to whether and to what extent media coverage provide attention to perpetrators. The current revenue model of the media complicates this issue, as the media compete for the attention of audiences and are expected to provide instant information online. The second ethical issue questions whether and to what extent the coverage constructs, reproduces or validates a prevalent narrative that exquisitely associates terrorism with a certain profile of political violence.

In Finland, the Guidelines for Journalists is the main code of professional ethics guiding good journalistic practice (The Union of Journalists in Finland 2014; Council for Mass Media 2014). In line with the self-regulatory nature of journalistic practice in Finland, the guidelines are abstract in their content. Finnish media organisations have considerable latitude in coordinating freedom of speech and social responsibility, and interpretations of the guidelines rely on the evaluation and ethical consideration of editorial staff and journalists (Koljonen 2013, 85). Consequently, the guidelines do not include instructions for reporting about a particular topic, such as terrorism.

Finnish journalists' professional understandings of ethics have been changing due to a shift in their professional ethos. This shift has been theorised by Koljonen (2013, 63), who maps the changes and continuities of the professional ethos of Finnish journalism using the framework of high and liquid modernity. Based on journalists' understandings of knowledge, audience, power, time and ethics, Koljonen traces a change from the ideals of high modernity, such as objectivity, empiricism, public service, consensus sustenance, recording the recent past, gatekeeping, professional community and regulation, to the ideals of fluid modernity, such as subjectivity, analyticity, consumer service, challenging the authorities, anticipating the future, agenda-setting, individualism and relativism (Koljonen 2013, 89). The Finnish journalist moves from a role of an observer-reporter towards a role of a participant-analyst. High modernity is determined by a hegemony of transmitting objective and empirical information, whereas in liquid modernity it is considered equally important to tell touching stories and provoke discussion. The shift from serving the citizen to serving the consumer points to how the audience is no longer regarded passive but also active participants whose preferences are taken into account and who may be used as sources. In relation to officials and policymakers, the emphasis has changed from consensus-building to confrontation, from a passive observer to an active influencer, and from a gatekeeper to an agenda-setter.

Consequently, the understanding of ethics has changed from a firm emphasis on the duty to tell the truth, deontological ethics, to also considering the consequences of revealing the truth, consequence ethics (Koljonen 2013, 88). In a liquid modern society, its members navigate amidst rapid, uncontrolled changes and interactive, complex networks. Experts are no longer seen as unquestionable authorities, and knowledge is collectively formed by the exchange of opinions and information (Koljonen 2013, 64). Whether these notions are visible in terrorism reporting is an interesting point to examine, as they suggest that journalists would be active, aware and questioning initiators instead of passive mediators and that they would not take expert authority as given.



Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen and Ahva (2016) studied the professional self-understandings of Finnish journalists by using Deuze's (2005, 447–450) breakdown of the fundamental values of Western journalism. These values include public service (the objective to serve the public by disseminating information and providing a platform for public discussion), objectivity (the understanding that journalism should aim to provide the public with as truthful and fair information as possible), autonomy (the norm that strives for self-sufficient and independent journalism outside the influence of other institutions), immediacy (the idea of speed and timeliness of journalism and keeping coverage up-to-date) and ethics (understood in relation to journalism's mission to advance freedom of speech, which requires responsibility, consideration and self-regulation) (Deuze 2005, 447–450).

In spite of economic and technological transformations that have affected the journalistic profession and working conditions, the sample of Finnish journalists were strongly guided by the core values of journalistic professionalism: autonomy, objectivity and public service (Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen & Ahva 2016, 1). According to the interviewed journalists, political and commercial institutions only have minor influence on their actions, which emphasises the structural autonomy of the profession and decision-making irrespective of actors external to the journalistic organisation (Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen & Ahva 2016, 7). In addition, the respondents valued their communicative mission that is based on autonomy and objectivity. They defined truthful reporting, independent observing and analysing current events as their most prominent functions. To conclude, the Finnish journalists perceive themselves as impartial and independent actors who pursue balanced, understandable reporting expressed in a narrated manner (Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen & Ahva 2016, 12, 15). Even though the respondents admit to having power, they claimed to avoid direct influence. They did not consciously consider their power in practical work.

Deuze (2005, 444) conceptualises journalism as an ideology to steer attention to how journalists give meaning to their work. In this context, the term does not refer to a struggle or rivalry of discourses but to the set of values, strategies and formalities that characterise professional journalism and emerge in self-reflections about journalistic work. According to Deuze (2005, 445), journalists that work in democratic countries share similar professional perceptions and values. In practice and across countries and media outlets newswriters interpret and apply these values in a myriad of ways. Ideological values can also be used to validate and self-legitimise the position or actions of journalists if they face public criticism (Deuze 2005, 446). For instance, the public service ideal can be applied to legitimise aggressive or interpretive reporting styles (Deuze 2005,

447). Critics claim that referring to objectivity is "an overriding reflect of journalism to make its professionals immune to any kind of comments or critique" (Deuze 2005, 448).

Furthermore, shifts in journalistic self-understandings have been examined in relation to disaster journalism and, more specifically, two school shootings in Finland. Even though school shootings have not been defined as terrorism in Finnish public discussion, they represent a similarly difficult topic to cover (Väliavironen, Koljonen & Raittila 2012; Backholm, Moritz & Björkqvist 2012). Terrorist events and school shootings share the central ethical problems of man-made catastrophes which include how the causes of the events and possible offenders are addressed (Koljonen 2013, 213). Here, the dilemma lies in the need to report what has happened without giving too much attention to the offenders that seek headlines.

Koljonen (2013) has also examined ethical considerations of Finnish journalists in relation to disaster journalism and, more specifically, to two school shootings that took place in Finland in 2007 and 2008. Previously, ethical considerations had more to do with the duty to disseminate information truthfully. During the first school shooting in Finland, journalists used all the means they had to disseminate information. They interviewed victims and eyewitnesses who were still in shock and approached them by questionable means to the point of intrusion (Koljonen 2013, 207). During the second school shooting, an emphasis on the consequences of the coverage increased. Journalists acknowledged the consequences of their actions for the society, for those involved in an incident, for their profession, for the media they represent and for themselves (Koljonen 2013, 207). Interviews after the second school shooting revealed that the journalists incorporated questions of consequences to their ethical considerations and no longer perceived journalistic duties as absolute. Instead, they interpreted them more relatively and one case at a time (Koljonen 2013, 210).

According to the interviewed journalists, the ever more intense news competition affected the actions of the profession, as all prominent news outlets operated online and the need to publish stories and pictures from disaster locations had grown exponentially (Koljonen 2013, 210). The perpetrators' aim for publicity was discussed in interviews in the aftermath of both shootings. Despite the shifts in ethical considerations, the journalists justified publishing stories about the shooters by their duty to disseminate essential facts about the incident (Koljonen 2013, 217). This duty could not take into account the attention-seeking nature of the perpetrators or the consequences of publishing the stories. Nevertheless, questions of showing the shooter became a major issue

within the journalists' ethical considerations during the second shooting, as the journalists had recognised the connection of their actions and the rise of copycats (Koljonen 2013, 219).

While the findings related to school shootings provide indications of journalists' perceptions about the responsibilities of the media in terrorism reporting, a gap remains in research about self-understandings of terrorism coverage specifically (Epkins 2012, 23). In national contexts, these perceptions have been the subject of some research. In the US, Epkins (2012) interviewed national security reporters from the prestige press and analysed their opinions on terrorism reporting and journalistic routines post 9/11. Prestige press refers to prominent newspaper, radio and television outlets that are not only nationally influential but also receive worldwide recognition (Epkins 2012, 22). Due to the heightened secrecy of US government agencies and national security responses, the respondents described the need to increasingly accept the use of anonymous sources (Epkins 2012, 30). While the journalists shared a belief that "the audience appetite for terrorism is waning", they did not accept the argument that the media might "help legitimize terrorist messaging" (Epkins 2012, 34). Instead, they emphasised the media's watchdog function and maintained that not reporting about terrorism would violate freedom of speech.

Likewise, Rao and Weerasinghe (2011) examined South Asian journalists' understandings of the level of social responsibility in terrorism coverage. Asked to define social responsibility, Indian and Sri Lankan journalists linked the term to accuracy, independence, fairness and social well-being (Rao & Weerasinghe 2011, 419). Even though the interviewees valued their responsibility towards the society and recognised that sensationalism could be avoided by reporting accurate information, they contested the media's ability to report terrorism in a socially responsible manner. This was due to marketing pressures from owners, lack of professional training and government manipulation of news (Rao & Weerasinghe 2011, 420). The authors noted a gap between core values and possibilities to implement them in practice. The South Asian political, cultural and societal context is different from the Finnish, and the professional positions and working conditions of Finnish journalists are evidently safer and more stable. However, the case study demonstrates the gravity of the research problem outside the Anglo-American context that is overrepresented in academia.

This section has justified the research approach of this thesis by introducing the Finnish context, reviewing the framing process as interaction of different actors, and presenting previous research on the professional self-understandings of journalists. Previous findings about Finnish journalists' ethical considerations and foreign journalists' perceptions about terrorism reporting provide a point

of reference for examining Finnish journalists' understandings about terrorism reporting in particular. In addition, they demonstrate that this thesis aims to fill a gap in research.

## **2.4 Conclusion of literature review**

Especially after 9/11, media coverage has been found to overrepresent the threat of terrorism, to follow prevalent narratives, to give attention to perpetrators and to transmit the interpretations of state officials (see e.g. Lewis 2011; Norris, Kern & Just 2003; Freedman & Thussu 2011). Even though national case studies expose some journalistic perspectives of terrorism coverage, many findings from and observations about terrorism coverage lack unequivocal explanations or origins. The hypotheses that the media's autonomy is lesser than generally thought and that news competition increases dependence on official sources raise a question of whether the circumstances of news work allow journalists to report independently and define events in their own terms. How does the editorial process proceed? What kind of sources do the journalists have on hand? How are they reviewed? Previous findings would suggest that during terrorism reporting journalists represent Brüggermann's (2014) definition of frame-senders, but this hypothesis is yet to be studied.

Theorisations about framing as a process and interaction (Brüggermann 2014; Van Gorp 2007), about a shift in the professional ethos of Finnish journalism (Koljonen 2013), and about the professional self-perceptions of Finnish journalists (Pöyhtäri, Väliaverronen & Ahva 2016) indicate that the circumstances in which terrorism coverage is produced need deeper examination. Whether the ideals and duties that Finnish journalists designate for themselves are also reflected in terrorism reporting remains an open question. For instance, findings about journalists' ethical considerations during and after school shootings suggest that a certain level of caution would have increased also with regard to reporting terrorism. It is yet to be established whether Finnish journalists consider the consequences of coverage when the topic is terrorism.

In this chapter, I have identified a gap in research and laid the theoretical foundations for the analysis of this thesis. Stump and Dixit (2011, 208) advocate for constructivist terrorism studies with a practice-oriented approach to shift the focus from what terrorism is to how social actors make sense of events. In the same vein, Epkins (2016, 263) calls for methodological approaches that unveil the multi-faceted levels of framing and provide context for the frames used. The next chapters shift the attention to journalistic perceptions and editorial practices.

### 3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design of this thesis: the research problem, research questions and methods. Methods include the method chosen for collecting the research material, semi-structured interviews, and the method of analysis, qualitative content analysis. In the first section, I elaborate and explain the research questions of this thesis. Second, I provide an overview of the collection and analysis of the research material. The descriptions of the chosen methods, the justifications for their use and the processes of material collection and analysis allow the reader to evaluate the research design and credibility of the results (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 26). Third, I evaluate the limitations of the chosen methodology.

#### 3.1 Research problem and research questions

The literature review maps a multifaceted research issue for this thesis. Terrorist events are inherently newsworthy and a frequent topic in the media. Yet politically motivated violence does not receive uniform or coherent treatment in public discussion. The dilemma of terrorism and the media lies in the media's task to provide objective and unbiased information about what happens in the world, which, admittedly, gives away publicity for the aims and objectives of various actors from perpetrators to state officials. The use of the term terrorism affects the way the public understands the phenomenon and the threat it poses.

This thesis studies the interplay of terrorism and the media in general and the role and responsibility of the media in reporting terrorism in particular. These aspects have generally been studied by analysing media coverage, which leaves a gap in research. Therefore, more specifically, the research issue addresses the journalists' perspective and outlook. The research question is:

**How do journalists perceive the role and responsibility of the media in reporting terrorism?**

To highlight journalistic and editorial practices and understand the background of journalists' perceptions, a sub-question follows:

**How do journalists describe the editorial process, and what kind of considerations influence journalistic decision-making?** The sub-question recognises that reporting terrorism is a process and practice in which journalists review the events, given facts, sources and context.

As the research questions already suggest, the orientation of this thesis is qualitative and empirical. First, the purpose of this thesis is to understand how a sample of professionals interpret a certain phenomenon. The study is, therefore, based on observations about the surrounding reality and its phenomena. The aim of qualitative research is to understand the researched phenomena from the research subjects' point of view (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 173). Second, the thesis examines meanings found in journalists' subjective interpretations. Qualitative research articulates the perceptions, observations and experiences of its subjects and is a suitable research strategy when the aim is to study the meanings and contexts of certain behaviour (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 27).

### **3.2 Interviews as research material**

To follow an actor-centered approach suggested by Epkins (2016), the research material of this thesis is gathered from interviews. As stated by Gillham (2005, 5), "good research questions almost point to appropriate methods." Gillham's statement points to identifying suitable research methods by assessing the aims of the study. The aim of this thesis is to illuminate journalistic perceptions and self-understandings in reporting terrorism. The research questions of this thesis make evident the need to hear out journalists, for which interviews are a suitable method.

In qualitative research, interviewing is one of the basic forms of gathering information (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 83). This is also the case in social sciences, in which it is among the most used methods of data gathering (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 11). Hirsjärvi and Hurme note that interviews have proven particularly useful for learning about people's opinions or beliefs, for gathering information and for understanding human behaviour or values. In this thesis, the choice to collect research material from interviews is based on their ability to deepen or explain the understandings already present in previous research (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 35).

#### **3.2.1 The semi-structured interview**

Gillham (2005, 3) separates interviewing methods according to the purposes they serve. For instance, questionnaires are favourable for large-scale, comparative data collection, whereas another form of interviewing might be more suitable for achieving a depth of understanding. This thesis opts for the latter by using semi-structured interviews. In this type of interviewing questions and topics remain open. In other words, the interviewee is free to decide for the content of their answers

instead of a choice format, such as ranking preferences from 1 to 5 or from unsatisfactory to satisfactory (Gillham 2005, 3). As the interview remains open, it allows both the interviewer and the interviewee to divert and the interviewer to pose questions to different participants in slightly different ways. A semi-structured interview is based on a preliminary review of the research phenomenon and aspects that are tied to the research problem.

The researcher or the interviewer has certain assumptions about the research subject that can be used to generate a framework of themes and, moreover, a plan for the interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 47). This framework is usually grounded on a comprehensive literature review, as existing research and theory suggest further classifications that evolve into interview questions (Gillham 2005, 19; Hyvärinen 2017, 18). Even though the interview is confined to these specific themes and areas that the researcher is interested in exploring, the semi-structured interview allows for some leeway to address them in each interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 48). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 88), the themes should provide meaningful answers with respect to the aim of the research and the research problem.

These guidelines in mind, I began the formation of interview themes with an examination of the literature review. The aim was to identify themes that are relevant in light of the research problem and research questions. Preliminary themes included: definitions of terrorism, editorial process, use of sources, the role of the media in defining and framing the events, the problem of attention, publicity and scale, conformity of reporting, responsibility for perceptions and understandings of threat, and ideals of reporting. I formed some more specific yet preliminary questions around these themes to coordinate the conversation. However, the interview frame remained sufficiently flexible to not limit the rise of new ideas. Semi-structured interviews have sufficient structure to ensure that the same questions are asked of all interviewees but also enable open answers and follow-up questions, in other words quality data (Gillham 2005, 70). This possibility to specify and deepen the topics discussed is the main advantage of using a semi-structured interview method (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 88). The full interview frame is provided in Appendix 1.

### **3.2.2 Overview of the interview process**

Qualitative research does not aim to generalise but rather to describe a phenomenon, to understand a certain activity or to give theoretically reasonable interpretations of a phenomenon (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 98). From this point of view, Tuomi and Sarajärvi note, interviewees should be

chosen on the basis of knowledge and experience of the researched phenomenon. To be able to examine journalists' perceptions about terrorism reporting, I chose Finnish journalists as interviewees. In this thesis, journalist interviewees represent experts rather than representatives of a particular media organisation. Generally, expert interviews are not an independent interview method but describe the profile of an interviewee (Alastalo, Åkerman & Vaittinen 2017, 181). Expertise may be based on science, profession or institution: an expert possesses information or skills related to a specific area that a layperson does not possess (Alastalo, Åkerman & Vaittinen 2017, 182). I treated the interviewed journalists as representatives of a profession. Their expertise lies in their profession and is defined by journalistic practice.

There is no universal or unequivocal answer to how many interviewees is enough for qualitative research (Hyvärinen 2017, 27). Qualitative research tends to describe a sample as discretionary: instead of statistical generalisation the aim is to understand a phenomenon more profoundly, gain information of a local phenomenon or look for novel theoretical viewpoints to a research topic (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 59). Therefore, significant information and qualitatively voluminous research material may be gained even from a small sample of interviewees. The objective of an interview is to collect research material that can be used to make observations and conclusions about the researched phenomenon (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 66). To end up with sufficient scope of research material, eight interviews with eight different journalists was set as a goal.

Few, if any, Finnish journalists specialise exclusively in reporting terrorism, even though many foreign news or online journalists regularly work with the topic. Initially, potential interviewees were confined to journalists who had either covered terrorism topics in their work or were editors of journalists who do so. Thus, I defined participation in reporting terrorism as the main criterion. Second, for practical reasons, the mapping of interviewees was limited to nationwide media. The recruitment process commenced by approaching potential interviewees in two ways, either by contacting them directly based on the topics they had written about or via editorial managers. Several interview invitations were sent, some were declined and some never answered to. The final recruitment of interviewees was based on voluntary consent. Interviewees either responded to the interview invitation by the author or spontaneously contacted the author after a manager had forwarded the invitation to staff.

Altogether, nine interviewees were recruited during the fall of 2019. The participants composed of four women and five men who work at the largest national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat, one of



the two national tabloids Ilta-Sanomat, the weekly news magazine Suomen Kuvalehti and the public service broadcaster Yle. Out of the interviewees, two work for Helsingin Sanomat, three for Ilta-Sanomat, one for Suomen Kuvalehti and three for Yle. Measured in circulation, Helsingin Sanomat is the largest daily newspaper in the country. However, in terms of online traffic, Ilta-Sanomat was the largest online media in 2019 (Reunanen 2019, 12). The varying financing models, publication paces and styles of reporting of this sample of national media prompts the question whether the workplace of the interviewees affects their perceptions of reporting.

Moreover, the interviewees review the situation from slightly different standpoints, as their roles vary from journalist, news journalist and foreign news journalist to foreign news producer and news editor, with professional experience ranging from eight to nearly twenty-five years. All interviews were conducted in person in December 2019 and the beginning of January 2020. The length of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes. All interviews were recorded to ensure accurate analysis of content. During the interview phase in December–January, all interview recordings were transcribed into approximately 70 pages of text. These transcripts of interviews were used as the research material of this thesis. In each transcript, the personal information of interviewees was faded and the interviewees classified as I1, I2, I3... to stand for interviewee 1, 2, 3 and so on. During the recruitment phase, anonymity was requested by one interviewee. Ultimately, processing and reporting the interviews anonymously was considered the best option, as this way the interviewees could speak freely. The interviewees were informed about the use and preservation of the research material in a consent form which is provided in Appendix 2.

### **3.3 Qualitative content analysis of interviews**

Content analysis can be regarded not only as a method but also as a theoretical frame which can be attached to different bodies of analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 103). The purpose of this thesis is to explore perceptions of a group of professionals, which calls for a qualitative approach. Content analysis is a method for examining documents in a loose sense. Here, documents may refer to books, articles, diaries, interviews, speech, discussions or any material that is converted into written form (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 117). Content analysis strives for a compressed and general description of the researched phenomenon in order to make conclusions from an organised form of the research material.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 117), both content and discourse analysis review meanings, but the two methods differ in that content analysis looks for meanings in the text, whereas discourse analysis examines how these meanings are produced in the text. This thesis uses qualitative content analysis to review meanings found in the transcribed interview material. Even though the apparent object of analysis is the transcribed interview text, the actual interest is in the journalists' perceptions decoded from it. The methodological question of the equivalence of the meanings found in the texts and the actual perceptions of the journalists is discussed subsequently in this chapter.

### **3.3.1 Theory-bound analysis**

Depending on which factors guide the analysis, it can be divided to data-driven, theory-bound and theory-based (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 108). In this thesis, the analysis is theory-bound, meaning that theoretical understandings function as starting points for analysis but can be adapted and refined based on what the researcher discovers from the material. Instead of an entirely data-driven analysis, the theoretical framework of the thesis functions as a tool in the thinking process and the examination of the material (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 109–110). Contrary to a theory-based analysis, theory is not used to test a specific theoretical model but rather as an inspiration for novel thinking and interpretation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 109). Therefore, results are reported in light of and with respect to what is previously known about the phenomenon. This approach was found most relevant in relation to the research questions of this thesis. The questions indicate that previous research provides ideas of the role and responsibility of the media in terrorism reporting, and that this thesis looks at how journalists perceive these ideas.

A theory-based analysis would require distinctive definitions of the researched phenomenon (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 111). Theory-bound analysis provides needed leeway for interpretations to arise, which is relevant for two reasons. First, answering the research question requires a certain level of openness. Second, the thesis is interested in the use of the term terrorism instead of a distinctive definition of it. The theoretical framework of this thesis provides research-based assumptions of the interplay of terrorism and the media and terrorism coverage by the media. It is necessary to note that the results of theory-bound and theory-based analyses are often similar and that their most significant differences lie within the analysis process (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 133). Even though a theoretical pattern or model does not directly function as the basis of analysis, the researcher's

knowledge and awareness of previous research and the theoretical framework admittedly affect the analysis process to some degree.

### **3.3.2 Overview of the analysis process**

As a technique, content analysis is about classification, grouping and categorisation: qualitative material is broken down and then grouped according to meaningful patterns, for example specific topics or issues (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 105). The analysis process commenced with a preliminary reading of the transcriptions of interviews without any presumptions or coding. During the first readings, I evaluated the research questions in relation to the material to establish whether the material was relevant in light of the questions and, hence, whether the questions needed to be refined. The following readings initiated the actual analysis and the beginning of coding. First, I focused on finding recurring themes by searching for meanings that relate to each other and can be grouped under the same topic (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 107).

I grouped parts of the interview material according to meanings that related to what journalists perceived as different kinds of roles and responsibilities in terrorism reporting. The coding was conducted with the research questions in mind: What did the journalists say about the roles of the media, the responsibilities of the media and the editorial process? What did they leave unsaid? Which meanings resembled roles, responsibilities and the editorial process even though they were not directly referred to as such in the answers? I linked answers about the editorial process to the themes to explain or elaborate the meanings found. Then, I colour-coded relevant sections within separate interview transcriptions and manually exported the encoded material to an Excel table.

As a result, the encoded material was no longer arranged according to separate interviews, but sections from interviews were arranged according to the themes they resonated with. The encoded excerpts did not represent the actual themes but meanings that were identified to belong under them. Each excerpt included a code (I1, I2, I3...) to be able to check the larger context of individual statements from original transcriptions. After arranging the encodings, it became evident that it would be more appropriate to treat them as examples of types instead of themes. Forming types is another way of grouping the material: within the found themes, common features are searched based on which a common example or generalisation, in other words a type, is formed (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 107). Types summarise various meanings that have shared denominators. In this

thesis, types are best understood as typologies or ideals. For instance, the types that represent the role of the media are profiles, condensed descriptions of ideals, tasks and activities.

This was a natural choice, as within journalism studies – especially the areas that study the role of the media within the society, journalistic values and the professional self-perceptions – arranging the researched phenomenon into types, categories or criteria is a common practice. For instance, scholars discuss and refer to news criteria (Galtung & Ruge 1965) and the core values of journalism (Deuze 2005) which are both sets of types. In the preliminary rounds of analysis, different meanings were found from the material which I used to construct types of roles and responsibilities. Subsequently, I reviewed the types in light of the theoretical framework presented in the literature review (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 134). Based on the confluences I found between the preliminary types and the theory, I refined emergent types and revealed connections between roles and responsibilities.

Even though the analysis process is often described with verbs such as find, form and emerge, the themes and types did not arise from the material without thinking, interpreting, experimenting, re-reading and re-evaluating. To fit the specific research questions of this thesis, I decided to come up with novel names for the types which resonate with, for instance, Deuze's (2005) fundamental values of journalism. The meanings that emerged from the material formed, first, thematical groups, and then, types of roles and responsibilities. From the Finnish journalists' perceptions, I identified four roles: *the reporter*, *explainer*, *transmitter* and *analyser*. These roles were condensed descriptions of the ways journalists perceived the duties, actions, ideals and realities of the media in terrorism reporting. Linked to these roles, I identified three areas of responsibility: *attention*, *context* and *balance*. In the following chapter, findings are presented in this order.

### **3.4 Limitations of the methodology**

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) note that interviews have proven particularly useful for learning about people's opinions, perceptions or beliefs, for gathering information and for understanding human behaviour or values. As a method for collecting research material, many of the constraints of interviewing are practical. It is a time-consuming method, and it can be difficult to recruit interviewees, talk them into participating or find time to arrange meetings (Gillham 2005, 4). However, the most profound limitations of the research design concern the reliability and validity of

interview accounts. Reliability refers to the repeatability of the research design, in other words that retesting produces consistent results. Validity refers to the accuracy and competence of the study and its conclusions and their correlation to external criteria (Gillham 2005, 5). In short, the answers of the interviewed journalists might reflect what a ‘good journalist’ should do and not what they truthfully perceive, and the interviewees could provide a different story at another time.

In terms of reliability and validity, the researcher needs to come to terms with the hindrances of collecting material through interviews. First, the interviewee usually does not share the purposes of the researcher. They are free to construct their answers, and the interviewer can merely hope they are not skewed towards what the interviewee thinks the researcher wants to hear (Gillham 2005, 6–7). Interviewees’ assumptions about the researcher’s purposes and the acceptability of certain answers undoubtedly guide their self-reflection. Within a single interview, the interviewees may shift viewpoints, present different and overlapping narratives and change context, which demonstrates that the responses are narrative constructions (Holstein & Gubrium 2011). Even though interviewed accounts about beliefs or attitudes are widely accepted as accurate, it has been pointed out that people’s verbal expressions about their attitudes are not necessarily conveyed in their behaviour (Gillham 2005, 7).

Second, by merely formulating questions the interviewer cannot help but direct the statements. The interviewer is as much a participant in the interview as is the interviewee (Warren 2011, 17). The interviewer’s background, such as their socio-economic, professional and disciplinary status, may shape their interpretations. It should be stated here, that the author’s professional journalistic background arguably forms some preconceptions. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 25) note that instead of purely objective information all knowledge is subjective at least to the extent that the researcher decides for the research setting depending on their own understandings.

The interviewed journalists’ understandings can only be considered as their own constructions about how they think they act, could act or should act. To overcome these issues Gillham (2005, 7) suggests the validity of an account of an interview should be evaluated in terms of “whether it is a balanced account of the interview that took place” instead of “a true picture of the person.” This way, the researcher complies to the impossibility to verify the accuracy of the statements. In qualitative research, the issues of validity can be overcome by credibility and assertiveness, that the interview accounts constructed by the researcher correspond to those by interviewees and that the processes in which the accounts are constructed are comprehensibly explained. In addition, the

interview frame was planned as non-provocative and open-ended and necessary theoretical aspects were explained to ensure a receptive atmosphere in the interview situations.

One could claim that the reconstruction of journalistic processes in interviews does not provide as truthful of an image as ethnographic methods and observation would. Undeniably, self-reflection long after or outside acute events cannot be as accurate as it would be “on the spot”. Journalists may not recall everything or have trouble specifying the stages of editorial work. To overcome this hindrance, the research questions of this thesis distinctively drill into the perceptions and opinions of journalists in relation to terrorism as an extensive news phenomenon rather than a single, specific news event. Due to a predefined schedule, the interviews had to be held during a specific timeframe. Therefore, it was not possible to wait for a terrorist event to occur and interview the journalists directly afterwards. The results are limited, as interviews could not be conducted while the editorial process of a specific event would have been fresh in the minds of journalists.

Lastly, unless interview data is analysed purely descriptively by, for instance, stating the occurrence of words, the researcher cannot avoid constructing interpretations of the interviewees’ statements (Gillham 2005, 6). The findings of an analysis depend on the research material but ultimately on the researcher, and a set of research material can lead to very different interpretations. This is especially so in qualitative content analysis, in which the framework, approach and the practical format for conducting the analysis are open. There is no explicit manual for the stages of analysis, but the researcher, to a large extent, has the liberty to construct one. Themes or types do not spontaneously rise from the research material but are always the result of interpretation, a conscious and subjective activity of the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 142–143). The methods used are therefore never neutral tools that produce the same results regardless of the thinking that guides the methods, the researcher or the sources of information (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 167).

In sum, the limitations of the methodology of this thesis have been taken into account by forming the research questions accordingly, by transparently describing the research stages, by providing excerpts from the interview material and by explaining the thought processes that lead to certain interpretations of the research material. This way, the reader can review the accuracy of the interpretations and conclusions of an individual researcher.

## 4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analysis of nine semi-structured interviews of Finnish journalists. In the interviews, the journalists discussed their perceptions of the role and responsibility of the media in terrorism reporting and described the editorial process behind terrorism coverage. Drawing from qualitative content analysis, I present the roles and responsibilities Finnish journalists designate for the media. Their descriptions of the editorial process explain and elaborate these views, as they provide insight into the circumstances in which journalistic deliberation and practice take place.

In the following, I present the findings of the analysis in the order of the four roles, *the reporter*, *explainer*, *transmitter* and *analyser*, and the three areas of responsibility, *attention*, *context* and *balance*. Within each section, the order in which I describe the findings follows the research question and sub-question of this thesis: How do journalists perceive the role and responsibility of the media in reporting terrorism? How do journalists describe the editorial process, and what kind of considerations influence journalistic decision-making? In addition, I discuss the implications of the findings in relation to previous research and for journalistic practices. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, the interviewees' first language. The excerpts from the research material have been translated from Finnish to English by the author.

### 4.1 Journalist perceptions of roles

In this section, I address the research questions of this thesis in regard to the roles designated for the media. The literature review raised several questions regarding these roles, such as: How much publicity is given to perpetrators? Does the phenomenon become over-reported because of its news value? Is terrorism coverage balanced, how is it framed and which actors take part in the framing process? How much definitive power does the media hold? In the interviews, the questions posed to the journalists were linked to these themes. Even though they include criticism towards the media, the interviewees were receptive of the questions and discussions that followed, spontaneously bringing up issues and difficulties they had recognised in their work or in the coverage of other media. Concurrently, the interviewees stressed that their answers were based on their own remarks and experience. Even though many interviewees outright admitted to prominent media criticism, some answers were hesitant. This is explained by the key tension in the interviews: regardless of their awareness, the interviewees were either pessimistic about their ability to find solutions or

sceptical about the solutions mentioned. Nevertheless, many interviewees expressed faith in the self-critical, self-regulating and self-developing nature of the Finnish media system in hopes of improving practices and coverage from the inside.

#### 4.1.1 The reporter

Out of the four types, *the reporter* was most prevalent in the research material. In sum, the reporter refers to the duties and functions of the media within society. The role is based on disseminating factual information, informing the public and answering the questions what, where and when. In the editorial process, the role is linked especially to an ongoing and evolving news event. The interviewees emphasised the media's duty to report what has happened and, therefore, cover recurring news topics such as terrorism. The duty to report was linked to traditional news criteria. It was underlined that the magnitude of terrorist events is substantial in terms of unexpectedness, exceptionality and scale. Such an extraordinary event requires reporting to the appropriate extent. The following two excerpts illustrate these aspects:

Naturally, it is always breaking news. (I1)

In the initial stages, it's just how many deaths, where, is it still dangerous out there, is the situation ongoing, has there been a possibility for a larger disaster. [...] When the situation is ongoing, it is very practical. (I4)

The interviewees place the topic of terrorism among other news topics with large societal impact, such as natural disasters, armed conflicts and large-scale accidents. However, the interviewees emphasised caution, "perhaps more than in any other news situation" (I9). In the interviews, news criteria came across as a guide for the appropriate scale of news reports. The more persons are affected or the closer (geographically or culturally) the events take place, the more attention is given to the event. The tradition of a professionally rooted set of criteria is described as an apparatus that externally navigates topic selection, which masks the agenda-setting power of the media. According to Deuze (2005), referring to professional values is commonly used to account for what, in reality, are deliberate actions. This practice was evident in how the role was justified by the journalists.



In relation to the role of the reporter, the journalists' justifications for their duties and actions were founded on external circumstances. The interviewee's descriptions about the editorial process of an ongoing news event conveyed a chaotic situation that increases the need for facts. A flood of unchecked facts and scarcity of confirmed information painted a picture of obscurity also in the newsroom. Among editorial work, it was the ongoing situation that the journalists perceived most challenging. These descriptions reveal two issues tied to the role. First, the interviewees were aware of the attention-seeking nature of terrorism (Nacos 2000; Nacos 2002). However, they underlined that self-censorship of the media would give leeway for speculation and turn the rumour mill faster:

I do not think that falling silent... It wouldn't have felt right if, for example, the Turku stabbings were a tiny piece of news in the very end of the printed page. In my opinion, it would also instigate rumours, the spreading of false information and speculation. (I2)

The interviewees described the situations as extremely prone to hearsay. As an example, several interviewees discussed the rumours that spread in the wake of the Turku stabbings in 2017. For instance, a video clip was claimed to show a shouting group of perpetrators with swords, when in reality the clip pictured bystanders warning passers-by and chasing the actual perpetrator. Dismissing self-censorship is an indication of the professional value of autonomy, but these justifications are also where the value of public service distinctly appears (Deuze 2005). The risk of speculation and the spread of false information was associated with social media where the origins and sources of posts are difficult to verify. Should the public end up with unreliable or deliberately maleficent sources, the risk for fear and panic would be far greater than in the case of moderate and accurate reports. This suggests that, even in a hybrid media environment, the interviewed journalists value traditional sources of information. As one interviewee put it:

If the purpose of terrorism is to create chaos, then the role of the media is to increase understanding, which is of course extremely challenging. (I7)

The second issue addresses the fine line between relevance and over-emphasis. In spite of the obscurity of the situation, several interviewees recognised a development of routines in the editorial process. In the course of the 2010s attacks in Europe recurred, forming certain practices within the newsroom. Several interviewees mentioned the tendency to publish multiple stories about the same event from specific angles and follow the events moment-to-moment. The editorial staff knew to look for eyewitness accounts, survival stories, heroic deeds, official statements and visual material

from the site. These practices account for what scholars have identified as the overrepresentation of terrorism in the media (Lewis 2011; Nacos 2002).

Whereas scholars identify 9/11 as a turning point for how terrorism has been discussed in public and reported especially in the Anglo-American media (Lewis 2011; Norris, Kern & Just 2003), the interviewees identify the previous decade as a somewhat similar pivotal period in terms of the editorial processes of terrorism reporting. Some interviewees questioned the practices that had evolved during this time, claiming that “each crackle” did not need a headline. Therefore, the role of the reporter emphasises the style of reporting. The interviewed journalists found it easy to justify *why* terrorism should be covered. However, *how* terrorism is covered requires more consideration and is central for journalistic work:

[...] it would be quite absurd if a terrorist attack took place in Europe, someone would run people over with a truck at a Christmas market, and nothing would be written about it. It's the tone and the way you tell things, that is where journalistic deliberation takes place. (I7)

During first-hand news coverage, I think it is terribly important that all information is reviewed. I know it's pretty damn hard, and there's a lot of stuff coming from all directions. But, in my opinion, a place with reliable information about what has happened is more relevant than stuffing every possible detail in a moment-to-moment follow-up article. (I8)

Some of the interviewees pointed to the public's thirst for knowledge that is supported by high levels of traffic that terrorism reports bring to news sites. Two conflicting aspects are identified from the interviewees' descriptions about the editorial process. First, there is constant pressure to publish new information about what is going on or what has happened. Second, there is equal pressure to avoid reporting that cannot yet be verified. Pressure and rush stand out from the interviews regularly. In relation to news competition, pressure is linked to the need to publish and the needs of news editors. In relation to the news environment and technological developments, rush is linked to the pace of the events, a need to remain up-to-date and find digital narratives, and a need to modify the reports for different platforms. Increasing deadline pressure has been hypothesised to make journalists dependent on official sources (Boesman et al. 2017). This notion is elaborated subsequently under the role of the transmitter. In the following excerpt, one interviewee summarises the mindset during the editorial process:

Thinking has diminished and doing has increased in all journalism, including terrorism reporting. (I5)

The professional ideals of disseminating factual information came across distinctly from the journalists' interviews, as illustrated by the emphasis on facts, fact checking and refraining from speculation. The role of the reporter resonates with previous survey and interview studies with Finnish journalists (Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen & Ahva 2016) and, therefore, suggests a rather homogeneous understanding of professional ideals and values in this national context. Similarly to Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen and Ahva's (2016) findings, the interviewed journalists are guided by autonomy, objectivity and public service, some of the core values of journalistic professionalism. The reporter is a rather traditional expression of journalistic values and the professional ethos of journalists, which is why the findings relate more to what Koljonen (2013) describes as the ethos of high modernity rather than liquid modernity. However, Koljonen too discloses that his divide does not need to be understood as a linear shift but can be regarded as a continuum. An emphasis on liquid values does not necessarily signify undisputed disconnection from traditional ones (Koljonen 2013, 89). Out of the fundamental values of Western journalism (Deuze 2005), immediacy is also evident in the research material. This is to no surprise, considering the universality of the characteristics and values of journalistic work (Deuze 2005, 445).

#### **4.1.2 The explainer**

The reporter answers primarily to the questions what, where and when, whereas the explainer answers to the question why. The role of the explainer stems from the political and symbolic aspects of terrorism. The explainer strives to explain individual incidents, as they require deeper explaining and contextualising than apolitical, more conventional acts of violence. One interviewee used the example of a car crash. If an accident is caused by a drunken driver, it does not require the same extent of reflection as running over people with terrorist motives would. Central for the role is to report about the actual frequency and extent of terrorist events, reasons behind political violence, the parties that commit violence and the areas and regions in which the majority of terrorist attacks take place. This is illustrated by the following excerpt:

Disseminating information responsibly and in such a way that people understand the phenomenon that is terrorism and the motivations behind it. [...] I get that choices need to be made and that we cannot report attacks in Kabul to the same extent that we report attacks in

Paris. But when we report, we should remind the public that, by the way, there are more attacks happening elsewhere than in Europe. (I2)

In the editorial process, the role of the explainer is subsequent to the reporter. The reporter resembles basic news work and initial descriptions of events. After such, an explanatory level needs to be reached. Even though explaining was considered a duty equally as important as reporting, this ideal is reached with varying degrees of success during different news events. The interviewees identified explaining and contextualising as one of the media's basic functions but admitted that especially during rapid news situations the result was not always adequate. This perception is similar to the contradictions journalists have identified in previous research, such as the inability to cover terrorism in a socially responsible manner due to, for instance, marketing pressures from owners and lack of professional training (Rao & Weerasinghe 2011). In addition, the role should manifest not only in times of occurrences but also in times of tranquillity. After the initial phase, the media should track the aftermath and outcomes of terrorist events:

We should follow them up until the very end, not just run around like crazy when something happens and then forget about everything. I long for some perseverance here. (I8)

The preceding excerpt is an indirect claim that terrorism coverage focuses on ongoing or recent events and a direct claim of the media's short-termism. Surely, ongoing events are far more dramatic than their aftermath. This expounds the notion that media coverage overrepresents the threat of terrorism (Lewis 2011). The role of the explainer is justified by the risk that excessive reporting amplifies the scale of events. Interviewees considered contextualising the events a counterforce. First, against terrorism coverage becoming violent spectacles and, second, against the political and inconsistent use of the term. The role brings forth the problems of defining terrorism and of politicising the label in, for instance, ongoing conflicts (Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004; Malkki & Sallamaa 2018; Millington 2018). The roles presented in this analysis are not definite but overlap and interact. Hence, these aspects are elaborated subsequently under the role of the analyser. On a continuum, the explainer does not, to the same extent, possess the agenda-setting qualities of the analyser. However, the following excerpt demonstrates that the borders of the roles are not definite. Constructing the different types is an aspiration to show the variety of the positions the media take:

Of course, we need to factually report what has happened, but it is as important, to say the least, to explain and increase the understanding of what has happened and why. To try to show the big picture, put things into perspective and see things through [...] Debunking rumours, isn't that the way, to not leave the defining for social media hecklers and people who have political aims and who politicise every possible attack [...]. (I7)

#### **4.1.3 The transmitter**

The roles of the reporter and explainer illuminate how journalists perceive the practical tasks of the media in terrorism reporting. Consequently, the meanings that form the roles of the reporter and explainer were more apparent in the interviewees' statements than those of the transmitter and analyser. The meanings that form the following two roles required more profound interpretation. The roles of the transmitter and analyser explain the interviewed journalists' understandings of the media's leeway, power and independence.

Out of the two roles, the transmitter is particularly evident in the first phases of terrorism reporting. In an ongoing news situation or shortly after, the media transmit the definitions of official sources, such as the police, prosecutors and political leaders. An essential aspect of the circumstances that shape the role is urgency, which is conveyed in the journalists' descriptions about the editorial process. Simplified, the process begins with a minuscule amount of rudimentary information. Gradually, more information emerges from scattered sources which the editorial staff reviews. The staff weigh the sources, statements and eyewitness accounts and attempt to verify them. The following excerpts demonstrate some aspects of journalistic deliberation:

Based on just anyone's Twitter post you cannot say it's a terror attack. The source needs to be reasonable. (I1)

At the point where, for instance, the police say they suspect a terrorist crime, that is when we can state that the police have found something such. [...] during the first days and the first hours we should try to trust the information provided by the officials. Unfortunately, it is often very scarce. (I9)

The transmitter is tied to the circumstances of rapid news events and, thus, linked to the role of the reporter. Obligated to report the facts, the media have few sources of verified information. Particularly in foreign reporting, the media rely on the local media and press agencies. Even if a

reporter is sent to the scene, information is retrieved with notable delay. Editorial considerations include examining the differences and similarities in the reports by different outlets. An interviewee would review several sources and assess which of the information on varying numbers of victims seemed most reliable. However, the dominance of official information is not only a result of the scarcity of reliable sources but also of the caution with which the media need to report crime. In the Finnish context, The Guidelines for Journalists (2019) instruct the media to treat a suspect of a crime in a manner that respects their rights. Moreover, the criminal process needs to be followed from the preliminary investigation to further judicial proceedings. The interviewees discussed terrorism in relation to criminal or juridical definitions, which explains why they emphasise the use of exact juridical terminology. This is considered “stating the facts” in news articles:

The media needs to be very careful with criminal offenses, as in this context we are often dealing with crime. [...] Terrorism crimes are a distinctive category within criminal law, and therefore one needs to be very careful to label something as terrorism if the authorities do not state so or vice versa. (I2)

There are always critique, and the media is blamed for not calling something terrorism. But we cannot make this interpretation in the news text ourselves, as a news article needs to be based on facts. (I4)

A pivotal moment in terrorism reporting is defining and framing events. Framing reveals the media’s active practices and choices behind seemingly objective and neutral coverage (Nacos 2002; Freedman & Thussu 2011). Interestingly, many interviewees regarded the term terrorism as juridical and discussed frames only after they were brought up by the interviewer. Interviewees perceived the use of terrorism terminology as a part of the narration of events, as the term describes under which criminal offenses the events are investigated:

We are not going to start reading the French lawbook to see how the French define terrorism. So it goes, in practice, that we say ”According to Macron it is a terrorist attack”, or whoever we are quoting. (I5)

With respect to Brüggermann’s (2014) continuum between frame-sending and frame-setting, the transmitter reflects the former. Particularly in the initial stages of terrorism reporting, journalists depend on official sources and transmit their interpretations of events. In particular, frame-sending refers to distinguishing whether an attack is labelled terrorism or not. Contrary to the professional

ideal of autonomy, the interviewed journalists described a strong dependence on external sources in the early stages of the news process. The evaluation of sources is elaborated in the interviewees' descriptions about what happens in the newsroom in an ongoing news event. The interviewees were unanimous about the criteria by which sources were reviewed and the event framed.

Some of the interviewees claimed that regardless of their dependence on official sources, the media frame the events independently and choose how to disseminate official interpretations. For instance, mentioning an official terrorism investigation did not require adding the term in the headline or more extensively using it in the body text. It is evident in the interviewees' answers that the reliance on official sources requires great trust in authorities: in the early stages, the media need to trust that the official information is reliable and the grounds for suspecting terrorism are appropriate.

According to the interviewees, it is important to express the incompleteness of any investigation and clarify the factors that officials base their definitions on:

I would say that we don't necessarily need to use it in the headline. I would also say that it is important to express that this is not a solid case but it's still under investigation. It is yet unclear whether this is terrorism or not. (I6)

These notions contradict with how the process is generally described. Even though framing is a greater practice than a simple choice of words, defining events as suspected terrorism arguably affects subsequent choices of angles and interviewees and changes the perspective through which the events are viewed. Often, events would first be discussed as an attack, a shooting or a stabbing. Only after an official statement, could the term terrorism be introduced:

I mean, it is not the media's task to distinguish whether this attack was terrorism or not, at least not based on first-hand knowledge. Naturally later on, yes, if it's not becoming clear. I don't think it's our task, in primary reports, to say that, yes, this was a terror attack, if there's no confirmation yet. And often there is none, before one digs into the perpetrator. (I1)

The media has a great need to stick to the facts and not to set off on solo jaunts. [...] It easily leads to following the definitions by the authorities a tad bit too long or sticking to the official investigation and its terminology. (I3)

The role of the transmitter distinctly establishes previous findings that highlight how the concrete autonomy of newsroom work is usually lesser than is generally thought (Robinson, Seib & Fröhlich

2016). The interdependence of governments and the media is evident especially in times of conflict (Brown 2003) and also linked to the media's commitment to transmit objective facts (Koljonen 2013). Terrorist events undeniably cause some societal conflict, as they are likely to increase ferment within the society and require official measures. Sources are a significant part of news production especially during violent crisis, which is also evident in the findings. Terrorist events are arguably a difficult topic for journalists to cover. From this point of view, the reliance on official sources can also be considered a strategic ritual of quoting (Moernaut, Mast and Pauwels 2018).

#### **4.1.4 The analyser**

The transmitter is tied to the circumstances of the first hours and days, whereas the role of the analyser comes into force in the aftermath of events. In the early stages of reporting the media depend on authorities and transmit official information, but as time passes the media's leeway and independence grow. Even though the roles of the reporter and explainer were more distinctly conveyed in the interview material than the roles of the transmitter and the analyser, media autonomy and the right to define social phenomena come across comprehensively if implicitly. The analyser expresses the agenda-setting role of the media and reflects active participation in societal and public discussion about terrorism, as "it is there where the media's societal role arises" (I3).

When the situation is ongoing, that's when we need to be careful. When the situation is over, that's when we start analysing and framing. (I9)

Not to just sit at the news desk and drop one story after the other [...]. More of the actual journalistic work. [...] What has been done a lot in the international media, if not in the Finnish media, is to report about terrorism also when the reports and the discussions are not initiated by terrorist organisations or others. [...] Not just within the frames offered by others, but on the media's own terms. (I8)

The analyser reports about terrorism outside the breaking news situations in the form of, for instance, follow-up stories, statistics, reconstructions and the media's own accounts of the chain of events. Ideally, the media report about terrorism and terrorists outside acute events and review critically not only the actions and practices of other institutions but also those of the media itself. The role of the analyser overlaps with the role of the explainer. However, the analyser holds greater power to set the agenda and confront officials, as the explainer contextualises current events and the



terrorist phenomenon. The explainer disseminates detailed information to increase understanding, whereas the analyser initiates discussion and debate.

To no surprise considering the self-regulatory structures of the Finnish media landscape (Koljonen 2013), the interviewees emphasise the self-directed nature of the media. They maintain that the recurrence of terrorist attacks in Europe has formed certain editorial routines and that through learning from previous reporting and possible failures the media has already acted in a self-repairing manner. These findings indicate the general atmosphere within the discussion about Finnish media regulation. The self-regulatory structures are critiqued periodically from the outside of the media system, whereas the media often invoke freedom of speech to justify the importance of self-regulation (Neuvonen 2016).

The role of the analyser is tied to the difficulty to define terrorism (Millington 2018; Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004). This debate takes place on various discursive arenas, and whereas the academia lacks a uniform definition, national lawbooks present a variety of juridical definitions (Millington 2018; Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler 2004; Simeon 2019). However, the definitional dispute is also one of the justifications for the role. The media is required to highlight ambiguous situations and explain possible problematics of defining specific events as terrorism. In addition, some interviewees pointed out that the juridical definition, including criminal offences, should not be the sole context in which terrorism is discussed in the media:

That is not the whole truth, only an angle to it. What is beneath? For example, we published a long story on the Turku perpetrator, explaining all the stages of his life, his childhood, the stages of radicalisation. [...] To open up these sorts of processes is precisely the fundamental core of what journalism needs to offer, after all. (I7)

[...] I believe we are not tied to the definition which, for instance, lawyers use, that terrorism equals a terrorist offense. We have a lot of responsibility, but in my opinion the best we can do is try to bring out different aspects of terrorism. I don't think it's necessary to only have one definition, as it is a complex phenomenon that can be viewed from different angles. [...] Us journalists do not need to wait for three years for a court ruling to be able to call something terrorism. It cannot be like that. (I9)

Some of the interviewed journalists found that a departure from the juridical definition would provide the media greater leeway, authority and autonomy. With respect to Brüggermann's (2014)

distinction between frame-sending and frame-setting, the analyser can be placed under the latter. Under the role of the analyser, journalistic intervention is greater and the journalist's personal interpretations play a larger role. Frame-setting refers to greater responsibility for frame selection and a lesser dependence on source-suggested frames. Thus, the interviewed journalists opine that the media should take part in the public discussion about terrorism definitions, even initiate debate. In their view, the media could call upon the inconsistencies of defining terrorism and underline the importance of perpetrators' objectives and motives instead of their religion, ethnicity or other personal qualities. The effects of terrorism coverage on the public and on society is another justification for a more active role of the media (De la Brosse & Holt 2019). However, just like the explainer, the role of the analyser manifests primarily as an aspiration. As a rule, the interviewees' statements are conditional. This is evident in the following excerpts:

We should provide a realistic idea of how worried one should be. After all, all terrorism coverage creates an image of what threatens the society. (I6)

If these conversations were had and policies made, the media could take part in the discussion about how terrorism is defined. In my view, forming some guidelines would be a healthy thing also for the Finnish media, and the media could start the discussion. (I2)

Even if the circumstances do not let the media take a stronger definitive role, the role of the analyser represents a mindset of questioning and contesting. For instance, even though the interviewees were unanimous that criminal offences need to be stated in news articles, it was considered an option not to use terrorism terminology in other respects. It was also suggested that official definitions could be challenged and insufficient grounds for investigations discussed in article formats that allow a subjective and opinionated tone, such as columns, analyses and comments. Questioning includes deliberating the appropriate scope of the coverage and clarifying which aspects remain uncertain or debatable. Ultimately, it includes reviewing official definitions and grounds for terrorism investigations once the media acquires more information about the background and chronology of events.

It would be a good idea for the media to be reasonably level-headed in how they react, that there would be at least a moment to think before putting terrorist attack in the headline. Wait a minute, how do we know this is a terror attack and which factors actually make it one? (I6)

The media's leeway and power, a more active role, is also found in latent practices. The media's editorial conventions during the reporting process, such as the selection of interviewees, the questions asked and the choice of words, set a basis for how an issue is framed. Even without a concrete frame, editorial decisions communicate initial interpretations of the events. Without any output from the authorities, the media might include the following statement in their reporting: "It is yet unclear whether terrorist intent is involved." These findings about editorial conventions relate to the concept of conventional news frames and illustrate their unconscious transition to media coverage (Norris, Kern & Just 2003). As conventional frames become pervasive within the news culture at stake, journalists may be unaware of the way the underlying frames shape their story narratives (Norris, Kern & Just 2003). This may explain why all interviewees did not concede that the media framed terrorism according to certain connotations or biases.

Even though some event would not be directly defined as or named terrorism, if we invite Leena Malkki [researcher of political violence] to the studio to comment on it, it already shows the frame through which the newsroom looks at the events. (I6)

I don't think [...] journalists think they are dividing people into terrorists and non-terrorists, but if an attack takes place in a public venue, it is common to write "it is yet unknown, whether this is terrorism". [...] Naturally the media also take the role of a definer, even though they certainly want to see themselves primarily in the role of a transmitter. (I8)

The interviewed journalists' perceptions of what the media should aspire in terrorism reporting reflect a more recent professional ethos of Finnish journalists and fluid modernity ideals over high modernity ones. The analyser resonates with ideals such as subjectivity, challenging the authorities and agenda-setting and the role of a participant-analyst (Koljonen 2013). Interestingly, in practice the journalists' descriptions of their actions are more related to the high modern professional ethos and values such as consensus sustenance and the role of an observer-reporter. Compared to the reporter, the analyser has more parallels with the professional self-perceptions of Finnish journalists which emphasise structural autonomy, faint effects of political institutions and independent decision-making (Pöyhtäri, Väliaverronen & Ahva 2016).

## **4.2 Journalist perceptions of responsibilities**

In this section, I address the research questions of this thesis in regard to the responsibilities designated for the media. Most media critique related to terrorism reporting highlight two things. First, that by reporting the media give publicity to the perpetrators who have designed their deeds to attract attention (see Epkins 2016; Nacos 2000; Nacos 2002; Schmid & de Graaf 1982). Second, that terrorism coverage does not provide a comprehensive image of the phenomenon as a whole. Rather, it either transmits a one-sided image of terrorism or exaggerates the scale of the phenomenon and, therefore, the threat it poses to the society (see Lewis 2011; Freedman & Thussu 2011; Liebes & First 2003; & Sallamaa 2018). The areas of responsibility elaborate this critique.

### **4.2.1 Attention**

Based on the perceptions of the interviewed journalists, the responsibility of the media is tied to questions of attention. In sum, it is the media's responsibility to assure that suspected perpetrators are not glorified or their deeds given excessive publicity. These aspects are also key in what makes the interplay of terrorism and the media problematic. In the editorial process, the responsibility lies in decisions to publish, as excessive focus on the perpetrator might provide inspiration and motives for copycats. On the other hand, attention refers to the scale and style of coverage. The interviewees identified these questions as some of the main issues in terrorism reporting. The following excerpt discusses decisions to publish the actions of perpetrators:

For instance, some news media published the video [a stream by the shooter of the New Zealand mosque attack] which I thought was an overkill. [...] Maybe it can be told that he has filmed the attack but publishing the tape or even excerpts from it, in my opinion that only plays right into the hands of the terrorists and like-minded people. (I2)

The importance of attention is justified by two factors. First, the media's status as one of the main sources of information provides definitive power over different phenomenon and the perceptions of the public (Moernaut, Mast & Pauwels 2018). Second, as any news report provides some degree of attention to the perpetrators, the benefits of such attention needs to be minimised. Many of the considerations during the editorial process circled around the scale with which the perpetrator was reported about. Questions such as whether to publish the names, pictures or extensive backgrounds

of perpetrators were often part of editorial considerations. The interviewees were aware of the responsibility of the media in deciding for the style and contents of coverage:

We have great responsibility, because even though it is these days significantly easier for the authorities to reach the public via, for example, Twitter, I believe that people still get most of their information through the press, at least in a situation like this. There is therefore a great responsibility in what and how it is reported. (I1)

According to the interviews, a recurrence of terrorist attacks in Europe in the 2010s made reporting more routine, and the “ordinariness” of attacks decreased the spectacle of the news events. When the peak of the European attacks passed, news coverage was considered to become more moderated. However, several interviewees described a concurrent development of online narration that could, in the worst case, result in shattered reporting. For instance, there is a tendency for up-to-date follow-up articles and “following live” -signs on the top of online news sites. These developments might add to the sense of chaos and ambiguity of the events. Another online tendency was to have multiple articles for the different angles of the story:

If the purpose of terrorism is to create chaos, is it reasonable to have an awful number of different headlines and publish journalism that builds an especially visual spectacle? [...] At some point it felt like we were publishing a lot and that certain angles were immediately on the way. The way I look at it, a more moderate volume could be the better way to go about it. To calmly and moderately explain, what is going on. (I7)

Interviewees described a general alteration in the coverage during recent times: attention to the perpetrator was replaced with increasing attention to victims, rescuers and those affected. The journalists’ deliberations are a clear indicator of the changing emphasis from deontological ethics to consequence ethics (Koljonen 2013). Instead of justifying excessive reports about the perpetrator by the duty to tell the truth, journalists assess the consequences and, rather, shift attention towards other aspects of the events. A similar shift was found in comparisons of coverage and editorial practices of two consecutive Finnish school shootings (Koljonen 2013).

However, the alteration is not without its problems, as there is a risk of excessive coverage of suffering caused by the events. In addition, the interviewees found that the Finnish media had little leeway to make independent publishing decisions. Some interviewees found abstention in Finland irrelevant because of the general dependence on foreign media and press agencies. In practice, even

though the Finnish media would not publish names or manifests, they might provide links to foreign online sources that do so as an act of transparency. Again, it is apparent that the journalists appeal to prevalent external circumstances as reasons for certain actions or inactions:

In a sense it feels like it is often not our decision whether a name or picture becomes published because of the current, massive information overload. And, of course, there are many different interests out there, but you just have to try to calm your mind and not get involved in the worst fuss. (I5)

This area of a responsibility partially conflicts with the role of the reporter. Having to report about terrorist events due to the core functions of the media, the line between sufficient and excessive coverage is difficult to draw. Consequently, the duty to disseminate information to the public clashes with the need to keep the style and scale of the coverage moderate. Reporting the necessary also conflicts with the circumstances of current, rapid news events. Online, the media are in a constant news contest. The following excerpt illustrates the issue:

Naturally, a four-sentence piece would not do [...]. One could always think about it a bit. Is it morally right to excessively jabber about it for very long? Where can one draw the line between the need for information and “sad news porn”? It has to be drawn somewhere. (I1)

In addition, the question of attention relates to the role of the reporter through the interviewees' emphasis on avoiding speculation. Adhering to verified information, or as the interviewees repeatedly stated, facts, the style of the coverage remains appropriate. The interviewed journalists found the scale of the coverage by the Finnish media rather appropriate particularly compared to the Anglo-American media, noting that coverage tended to become the more prudent the closer events come to Finland. This tendency is in line with previous research that found events in the base country of the media organisation to be covered more moderately than events abroad (Iqbal 2017).

The interviewees' descriptions about the editorial process highlight the circumstances in which the journalists operate and the hindrances that might affect the quality of the reports and the editorial staff's opportunities to reach the ideals of good journalism. The interviewees mention pressure from editors and supervisors but also the variety within editors that work with topics such as terrorism. As an example, one interviewee described working during the Christchurch mosque attack that took place in New Zealand in March 2019. The interviewee noticed that some international media published excerpts from the shooter's manifest but knowingly left them out of their articles. As the

interviewee's shift ended, they notified incoming colleagues not to publish the manifest. Later the interviewee saw excerpts published regardless. What implicitly came across in the interviews was that decisions by some editors, colleagues or competing media were not always approved of and that journalistic deliberation depended on the current work force.

Attention is linked to the discussion about a potential two-sided relationship between terrorism and the media due to the attention-seeking nature and newsworthiness of terrorism (Iqbal 2017; Ekins 2016; Nacos 2002; Lewis 2011). Generally, the interviewees were aware of the link between qualities of terrorism and the logic of the media. As one interviewee puts it:

It is like violent communication or communication through violence, which certainly links it to the media problematics and pretty much opens up what makes it such a challenging news topic in its entirety. (I7)

Another interviewee described the difficulty to avoid giving attention to striking, symbolic acts that cost lives. However, the interviewees were, in this regard, divided in their perceptions about the proactivity of the media. Some were reluctant to perceive the media active but, rather, tied by the circumstances. Others were more straightforward, stating that claims about a symbiosis were evident and, in their opinion, indeed true. To present the nuances in the interviewees' perceptions, it is considered important to provide several excerpts that discuss this matter:

It is difficult for the exact reason that terrorists aim to exploit the media and that the media logic is what it is. It is not always easy to draw the line between to what extent and what way the acts are reported. In my opinion, even in Finland, [...] more discussion should be had about the tones of reporting, about what is told and what left untold. In a hectic news situation, it is easy to forget about responsibility and considerations. (I2)

Of course, the media has some function there, but on the other hand these things cannot be left unreported. It is like walking on eggshells. [...] I understand the critique, in a sense there is some sort of a symbiosis, but I don't know if it can be prevented in any way. (I4)

On one hand, one can say that the media is doomed to fail. In a way, you cannot succeed very well in terrorism reporting, and the word symbiosis is probably a good way to put it. On the other hand, the media is not dependent on terrorism, terrorism probably is dependent on the media. (I7)

It is symbiotic, it is problematic, it is a dilemma. For decades, terrorist organisations have been aware of the ways the media can be harnessed for their aspirations. Already in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the mass media has been utilised for terror, and ever since the 1960s and 1970s this has been pretty evident. [...] How should I say it... We are, well, in a shitty situation. (I9)

It should be noted, that the interviewees discussed terrorism at various levels from a specific type of criminal offence to an in-depth phenomenon. For instance, some interviewees had not profoundly reflected upon the definition of terrorism even though they had repeatedly worked on the topic, whereas others were acquainted with the academic understandings of the phenomenon, the history of specific terrorist organisations and terror as a communicative strategy. One interviewee lectured about the rise of modern terrorism and its connection to the rise of the mass media. The depth with which journalists understand the complexity and rival understandings of the phenomena they report about raises questions about their competence to evaluate the media's performance. Furthermore, it raises questions about their ability to provide context, the subsequent area of responsibility.

#### **4.2.2 Context**

Along with attention, the responsibility of the media is tied to questions of context. In sum, it is the responsibility of the media to put terrorism as a phenomenon into perspective and convey a realistic image about it. The responsibility to contextualise is also tied to perseverance, that events and their aftermath are followed through. In addition, the interviewees identified a need to explain the ambiguity of the phenomenon. The need for context is not a unique feature of terrorism reporting but applies to large, complex and fast-paced news events in general. The following excerpts summarise the tasks linked to this area of responsibility:

[...] that the public is given a proportionate idea of the threat that terrorism poses. [...] As I described earlier, the sort of journalism that describes the background. What all this is about and what these different organisations and networks actually are. (I6)

It is an ambiguous matter to define terrorists and the threat they pose, even juridically, and there are contradictions. Journalists should be aware of and describe this to the readers. It is essential to open up these different perspectives. (I7)



Attention as one area of responsibility was justified by the media's status as one of the public's main sources of information, which makes the media responsible for the information they transmit. The same justification is evident in relation to context. The information should put terrorism in correct proportions in numbers and geographically. Some interviewees regarded contextualising a way to minimise fear that terrorism reporting might cause within the public. In addition, the media could report about terrorism prevention and security measures to the extent that is possible without compromising the work of officials. However, the interviewees also perceived the media's ability limited in affecting how coverage is received. They raised questions about the public's ability to process the transmitted information and could not provide other solutions than reliable, factful communication and trust in the reader's ability to review the information reasonably and analytically. Among some interviewees, one could even sense frustration:

Sometimes I feel like it does not matter how much we report and how. If people take it into their heads that you should not go to any suburb in Sweden because there is gang violence, it is very hard to fight against such perceptions. People read the news through their own glasses or even eyes covered. Of course, we write stories [...] but how our messages are received is a completely different matter. (I5)

Context is evidently interrelated to the role of the explainer. The explainer represents the actions that result in contextualising and explaining individual events and the phenomenon as a whole. Context refers to the aspirations of the explainer and highlights the media's status and power to include and exclude (Nacos 2002). However, the ideal manifests in varying degrees. Two types of deficiencies rose from the interviews. First, terrorism is covered mostly when attacks take place and the situation is ongoing, whereas spontaneous and voluntary news coverage outside these events remains scarce. Second, some interviewees claimed that the readers' interest lies in the hectic phase of coverage and less in subsequent but more profound definitions, analyses and contextualisations. Interest in dramatic details overrules the wider perspective, and explaining the overall picture and context is, therefore, left for later or sometimes forgotten.

That it is not left to "there was this attack and this many died". To describe the victims, the heroes, something about the terrorists and their motives. Their convictions should always be followed through [...]. This is probably more related to crime journalism than terrorist reports, but sometimes it is the media's weakness to complete these matters. (I5)

Consequently, the interviewee's descriptions about the news process connect the issues related to context to those of the reporter. The early stages of the editorial process are described as hectic and changing, and verified information is scarce. Context can be examined not only from an informational perspective but also from a more technical one. Amidst the immediate situation, the need to inform may fade out the context, not because the media fails to explain the events but because these explanations are scattered between several articles and headlines in an online layout. Due to the fragmentation of online narration and the large quantity of articles, it requires effort to gain an overview among individual stories and new pieces of information. The media are responsible for the clarity of the narration:

[...] it should not look like we instigate the chaos. [...] The overall picture is easily blurred. We add details after details, and easily the disorganised situation starts to transmit to the coverage. We have eyewitness accounts here and event descriptions there, and we don't necessarily keep up with the big picture. [...] It may create more chaos than order and not help readers absorb information if we publish many articles in a fragmented fashion. Certainly, there is still work to be done in contextualization [...]. (I7)

#### **4.2.3 Balance**

As the third area, the responsibility of the media is associated with questions of balance. Balance is tied to the difficulty in agreeing upon a common definition of terrorism and, therefore, the myriad ways of applying the term. Balance comes across as staying consistent in covering and framing terrorism in the media. For instance, attributes such as the religion or ethnicity of the perpetrator should not define an attack. On the other hand, balance comes across as caution: knowing the complexity of the term, the media should not apply the frame before sufficient grounds advocate for its use. In sum, balance is about taking responsibility for the defining power of the media and for semantics, in other words the meanings and connotations of different terms.

Minding semantics clash with the effort to add variety in phrasing, as using synonyms to avoid repetition could result in using the "wrong" term. Here, the chosen angle, perspective and words matter. It is exactly the narratives and representations associated with the term terrorism that the media's ability to influence interpretations of terrorism is found on (Freedman & Thussu 2011; Huff & Kertzer 2018). This shows that the interviewed journalists are aware of the influence their choices may have:

The journalist should be aware of the meanings that these words have and use them consistently. (I3)

It seems that nowadays the press has begun to emphasise that a Western person alike can commit a terrorist attack. Muslims alone are not the ones committing them, and it is not a question of one's background. It's all the more important in those cases to emphasize, so that people understand that terrorism does not refer to a particular ethnic background. (I1)

With respect to the preceding excerpt, balance is intrinsically linked to the idea of a dominant terrorist narrative. Some interviewees described what scholars have called the current terrorism discourse, which associates the term with, for instance, the Middle East and Jihadism (Malkki & Sallamaa 2018). The interviewees were aware of this discussion but reviewed performance by and activity of the media in different ways. One interviewee referred to this subject by suggesting that, in recent times, the officials had had difficulties in defining all acts as terrorism that should have been defined as such. Mirrored against the role of the transmitter, the media would be bound to follow official definitions. To prevent this, a more active initiative is required, which links balance with the role of the analyser:

The terms used by the authorities, I even tried to look for an example where the media in some country would have somehow taken the role of a forerunner. I could not find one, but I wouldn't rule out that in such cases it could and should be so that the media precedes the authorities in the use of the term terrorism. (I3)

Another interviewee wondered whether journalists excessively trust the public's media literacy and remained uncertain of the origins of the connotations of terrorism. They pondered, whether the media linked terrorism to Islamic radicalisation or whether it was an interpretation of the public, the receiving end. Considering that previous research has shown Anglo-American media to follow a partial terrorism discourse (Freedman & Thussu 2011; Huff & Kertzer 2018), a similar tendency could be expected from the Finnish media which is under constant international influence. Studies also suggest that a prominent source for prevalent terrorism discourses are governments and other official actors (Miller & Rizwaar 2011), a notion that is evident regarding the 'war on terror' discourse (Norris, Kern & Just 2013). National media have been found to transmit similar over-emphases as national governments (Miller & Rizwaar 2011), which resonates with the fact that few interviewees opined that the media framed terrorism in a skewed or deficient manner.

Furthermore, these perceptions also illustrate what has been discussed as the effects of the temporal context (Millington 2018). Definitions of terrorism have been suspected to follow observations of current events. Another explanation for the perceptions could lie in professional self-understandings: Finnish journalists were found to understand themselves as impartial and independent actors who pursue balanced reporting (Pöyhtäri, Väliaverronen & Ahva 2016). Nonetheless, some interviewees were more certain a general connotation indeed exists:

Generally speaking, I think that Islamic terrorism is highlighted. Somehow it is more easily understood as terrorism compared to some other act [...]. I think that these types of acts, such as acts by Isis, are understood as some kind of a terrorist prototype, or in other words, that this is real terrorism. (I6)

In some sense the media tries to distribute the responsibility somewhere else. Some poor researcher is alerted on the spot to explain terrorism as a general phenomenon when it is not even known whether it is a terrorist attack or not. Of course, it is having power to define and responsibility for this power. (I8)

Some interviewees discussed the frequency of terrorist events and identified that the media tended to treat the events in a uniform manner. Reoccurring terrorist attacks were covered and the newsroom organised according to routine conventions. In sum, events that had similar qualities to past ones were framed in similar ways despite the lack of confirmed information about the motives. In addition, terrorist attacks in Europe had changed the newsroom's reaction to events of a certain profile, for instance vehicle-rammings and stabbings. One interviewee described events close to Siilitie metro station in Helsinki in December 2016. As reports emerged about a person running over people, the initial assumption in the newsroom was terrorism. In any case, such an event was rather substantial local news, but the staff prepared to treat it as an even more significant happening. Later, it emerged that the driver had suffered from a seizure. The same interviewee continued:

[...] whenever something happens that initially seems like a terrorist attack [...] the newsroom is pretty sensitive to start making it really big or at least showy news before we know anything about the motives. [...] Even things that, before terrorist attacks became widespread, were not necessarily paid attention to are now making the newsroom vary and are raised to the fore in rather big headlines but buried quickly once the motive changes. (I7)

[...] it has been a long time especially in Europe, long time relatively speaking [since the last significant terrorist attack]. But there have been fairly many [small] incidents, running over crowds or individual knife attacks. Often one shouts Allahu akbar and may have been inspired by Isis, but work alone, sometimes even on a whim. [...] Maybe we should be a bit more cautious, and surely we are, in how much media attention they are nowadays given. (I5)

Even though all interviewees did not directly concede to hold the media accountable for inconsistently applying terrorism terminology or for affecting the formation of connotations, events that follow a certain profile direct the editorial process and receive particular treatment. The interviewees found the term terrorism a useful description for the media, should it be defined accurately and used consistently. The term was considered helpful to separate political violence from other forms of violence and to provide context. Some interviewees found other terms, such as stabbing, explosion and shooting, more descriptive and neutral and, therefore, more useful for the media. Using terms such as shooter, attacker, perpetrator and suspect is a means to tackle the issues semantics raise. One interviewee pointed out that at times the motives of the attack are not solved, and without confirmation for the political motives the use of the term terrorism could not be justified. In addition, the use of the terminology requires definitions of what is meant by a terror attack and who has made the definition:

At a point where all blatant violence is to be called terrorism the definition no longer matters. But when it is used in a controlled, selective and justified way, at least every once in a while defining what it means, then it is a useful term. (I9)

Despite linear and unequivocal perceptions that the interviewed journalists had about defining the terminology used, no common agreement or guidelines exists that the journalists could use. The interviewees described variable guidelines, alignments or instructions in different newsrooms. When it came to publishing decisions, the style of reports or applying terrorism terminology, primarily the newsrooms lacked written guidelines and resorted to case-by-case evaluation among those working. Consequently, it is to no surprise that the media follow juridical definitions of terrorism. Only one interviewee discussed the media company's decision to aim to replace terms such as terrorist attack with more descriptive ones, and another interviewee described training they had organised within the foreign news department which had also involved researchers or experts.

### 4.3 Summary and implications of findings

The interviewed journalists' perceptions speak of their views about the professional and societal status of the media in a crisis situation. In this section, I summarise the key findings of the analysis and discuss their academic, practical and societal implications and contributions. I review the findings in light of existing knowledge about terrorism and the media, the professional self-understandings of Finnish journalists and journalistic practices. Based on the interviews of nine Finnish journalists and on the theoretical framework, the analysis designated four roles and three areas of responsibility for the media in terrorism reporting: the reporter, explainer, transmitter and analyser, and attention, context and balance.

The reporter disseminates factful information to the public to prevent speculation during evolving news situations. The role is interrelated to attention, the responsibility to assure that perpetrators are not given excessive publicity and that terrorism is reported with appropriate scale and style. The explainer describes the background and contextualises individual incidents. The role is also interrelated to attention, as contextualising was considered a counterforce for overrepresentation. However, the explainer is most prominently interrelated to context, the responsibility to put terrorism into correct proportions in numbers and geographically, to report in the long-term and to explain the ambiguity of the phenomenon. The transmitter refers to the early stages of reporting in which the media are dependent on official sources of information and transmit their interpretations of events. The analyser works in the aftermath of events with greater leeway, sets the agenda of the discussion about terrorism and reviews critically not only the authorities' actions but also the media's own practices. The role is linked to balance, the responsibility to stay consistent and cautious in covering and framing terrorism.

In sum, the roles of the reporter and explainer illuminate how journalists perceive the practical tasks of the media in terrorism reporting, whereas the roles of the transmitter and analyser describe the media's leeway and independence. In the research material, the meanings that formed the roles of the reporter and explainer were more apparent than those of the transmitter and analyser. On the other hand, it is evident that out of the four roles, the reporter and transmitter refer to actions that take place, whereas the explainer and analyser are conditional. This is a clear implication for what the interviewed journalists thought the media should do more, better or more long-term and, therefore, points to the areas that need improvement in journalistic and editorial work. A discussion

of the professional ideals of terrorism reporting can be connected to how the journalists describe their current working conditions, time pressure and expectations from the above.

The borders of the roles are not definite. Rather, they represent different stages of reporting, changing interaction between journalists and their sources and the positions the media take in the chronological phases of terrorism reporting. The roles demonstrate the fluidness of the positions of the media, especially related to Brüggermann's (2014) continuum between frame-sending and frame-setting. The roles and responsibilities do not exist in vacuum but interrelate and overlap. On a continuum, the explainer and the analyser have more autonomy and include more subjective choices than the reporter and the transmitter. However, all roles can be identified within a single news situation and in the daily work of journalists. The fluidity of the roles illustrates how journalistic professional values manifest in various ways in practice (Deuze 2005).

#### **4.3.1 The "shitty situation" of covering terrorism**

Terrorism might need the media, but the media most certainly do not need terrorism. This is how the interviewed journalists' perceptions about the interplay of terrorism and the media can be summarised. Most of the journalists' answers and statements were uniform, but when it came to the interplay of terrorism and the media, discrepancies in their attitudes were apparent. One interviewee would describe terrorism as a topic among others, while another would regard it a difficult subject that demands caution. Some would discuss how terrorists undeniably harness the media's logic for their purposes but stressed the media's inactivity in the situation. Finally, some found "symbiosis" a descriptive term for the interplay, maintaining that, by reporting, the media provide terrorists with publicity and therefore take part in a two-way interconnection of sorts.

The findings of the analysis point to the aspects that make the interplay of terrorism and the media problematic. These aspects are at the core of the logic and function of the media, which is arguably the reason why the interplay has been of academic concern for so long and why it remains a current research topic decades after the emergence of the research area. There is an unresolved contradiction between the necessity to report terrorism and the simultaneous negative contributions of this practice. The issues and hindrances of terrorism reporting become particularly evident in the interviewees' descriptions about the editorial process, which is described as turbulent, even chaotic. These descriptions also explain some of the common discussions about the interplay of terrorism and the media.

For instance, the scarcity of verified information arguably increases the media's dependence on official sources, a notion stressed by Robinson, Seib and Fröhlich (2016). Equally, it illustrates the interdependence of governments and the media in times of conflict (Brown 2003). Furthermore, even though the interviewees did not find the media dependent on terrorism, as there are countless other topics to fill the pages with, the news contest online seems to affect any large news event. The interviewees discussed the pressure to publish from multiple perspectives. In this regard, deadline pressures have indeed been believed to account for journalists' dependence on official sources (Boesman et al. 2017). The interviewees' descriptions about the tendency to publish scattered stories online and to prepare to treat even the most rudimentary suspicions of terrorism as prominent breaking news contribute to previous findings of the overrepresentation of terrorism in the media (Lewis 2011; Nacos 2002).

The journalists described certain routines with which terrorist reports have been produced after a reoccurrence of attacks. These descriptions resonate with academic discussions about conventional news frames and prevalent terrorism narratives (Norris, Kern & Just 2003; Malkki & Sallamaa 2018). As journalists attach a novel event to the context of previous ones based on initial similarities, they may not notice the use of frames that situate the events in a certain framework and describe the event with certain common narratives. The interview material revealed editorial conventions – the selection of interviewees, questions asked, word choices – that set a basis for how an issue is reported and communicate initial interpretations of the events. The circumstances of the editorial process are presumably not only a feature of terrorism reporting but apply to large and fast-paced news situations in general. Regarding terrorism reporting, increased difficulties arise from the political nature and connotations of the term as well as the ongoing definitional debate.

The interviewees' perceptions led to the emergence of aware and active roles such as the explainer and the analyser. However, a certain passiveness was equally present in the roles of the explainer and the transmitter. The interviewed journalists had strong presumptions about how the system works and why things should be done a certain way. Furthermore, the interviews present a tendency to hide behind external circumstances and actors to mask one's own actions and responsibilities. For instance, news criteria were discussed as an external apparatus that defines what is covered even though journalists have, with certain qualifications, the power to decide what they write about. Just like conventional frames, the journalists have internalised these criteria to the extent that they no longer consciously review their own actions. Moreover, even though the interviewed journalists



were aware of the issues that terrorism as a news topic poses and recognised that they are responsible for their actions, the most critical issues remained unsolved.

The "shitty situation" sums up this mindscape. For instance, even though an interviewee found giving publicity to perpetrators problematic, they simultaneously found it greatly difficult to avoid reporting about striking, symbolic events that cost lives. In light of previous research, this notion is not surprising. After all, scholars have described the difficulties of covering terrorism, if not even the "impossibility" to do it well (Vartanova & Smirnova 2011; Epkins 2016). It is evident in the journalists' interviews that whatever one does, one cannot quite succeed. A contradiction lies in how, on one hand, journalists value the status of the media as the public's source of information but, on the other hand, as issues are raised find the circumstances impossible for alterations. In sum, a key contradiction in the findings is the tension between awareness of issues but pessimism about one's abilities to find solutions.

#### **4.3.2 Journalist self-perceptions about terrorism reporting**

Regarding the interviewed journalists' professional self-perceptions in terrorism reporting, the findings of the analysis largely follow previous understandings about Finnish journalists' perceptions about the professional values that guide their practical work, their status and their responsibilities. The findings suggest that Finnish journalists have a rather homogeneous understanding of professional ideals regardless of the topic in question. It can also be noted that at least some of Finnish journalists' perceptions about terrorism reporting are comparable to those of journalists interviewed in case studies in other countries. For instance, both Finnish and South Asian journalists valued responsible reporting but contested the media's ability to carry out the ideals due to several external reasons (see Rao & Weerasinghe 2011). Within both national contexts, a gap between professional values and their practical implementation can be recognised.

Furthermore, American journalists share similar understandings of the interplay of terrorism and the media. Similar to the Finnish interviewees of this thesis, American respondents were surprisingly disparate in their views. However, the majority of Finnish and American journalists either denied that the media served terrorist deeds or justified terrorism reporting with other duties and ideals, such as public service and freedom of speech (see Epkins 2012, 26). Contrary to their American colleagues, the Finnish journalists interviewed for this thesis did not specifically discuss the use of anonymous sources. However, they, too, described routines that had formed in the 2010s.

The role of the reporter is based on notions of objectivity, public service and immediacy and is, therefore, a rather traditional expression of professional journalistic values (Deuze 2005; Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen & Ahva 2016). Even in a hybrid media environment, the interviewed journalists value the media's status in the society. In turn, the analyser resonates with what Koljonen (2013) has identified as a shift in the professional ethos of Finnish journalists: high modern values such as objectivity, consensus sustenance, gatekeeping and the role of an observer-reporter are replaced with liquid modern ideals such as subjectivity, challenging the authorities, agenda-setting and the role of a participant-analyst. The inclusion of both high modern and liquid modern professional ethos within different roles suggests that the shift mapped by Koljonen (2013) is not purely linear. Compared to the reporter, the analyser resonates with Finnish journalists' previously identified self-perceptions of structural autonomy, independence from political institutions and independent decision-making (Pöyhtäri, Väliverronen & Ahva 2016).

Furthermore, the findings of the analysis seem to confirm a shift in how Finnish journalists review the ethics of reporting, as the journalists' deliberation indicate an emphasis on consequence ethics instead of deontological ethics (Koljonen 2013). A similar shift has been found in comparisons of two consecutive Finnish school shootings (Koljonen 2013). In practice, journalists assess the consequences of their editorial choices and reporting instead of acting in the name of the duty to report. For instance, this could be seen as assessing whether or not to publish the name or picture of the perpetrator or extensively describe their background and story.

It is evident that the professional ethos and ideals of journalists are based on what they value in their work and how they perceive their duties within society. Values guide one's behaviour, but they do not ensure that outcomes are in line with aspirations. The question of objectivity is an enlightening example: even though it has been identified as the key element of professional self-understandings, critics have voiced the impossibility of ever reaching complete objectivity (Deuze 2005, 448). This has resulted in attempts to revisit the concept with synonyms such as fairness or impartiality and in an emphasis on the importance to strive for objectivity regardless. In the interviews, the journalists emphasised media autonomy even though concurrently they described dependence on official sources.

It seems that the journalists review their work strongly in terms of the traditional values and ideals of journalism and, most importantly, appeal to these values if something needs to be improved. Appealing to professional values has been recognised as a strategy to respond to critique (Deuze

2005). In relation to journalistic practices during two school shootings in Finland, the findings are similar. Journalists admitted some of the errors of the media but appealed to editorial autonomy and freedom of speech to maintain that what constitutes ethically acceptable journalism cannot be dictated from the outside (Koljonen 2013, 206). Objectivity is an intriguing notion also because the media's dependence on official sources has been linked to the ideal of objective reporting. The strong ideal guides journalistic work even though it is left open what it is exactly about official information and statements that make them, and not information acquired from other sources, objective facts, as the journalists have a tendency to state.

The interviewees of this thesis, too, emphasised the self-regulatory and self-directed structures of the Finnish media system as central for improving the media's performance and learning about past mistakes. Indeed, the interviews with nine Finnish journalists suggest that the interviewees found the media to have made some changes in the style of reporting. For instance, many interviewees suggested a rather recent shift in replacing coverage about the perpetrators to the victims, heroes and rescuers. In addition, the coverage was considered to have become more moderated after attacks in Europe became more routine and a peak of attacks in the 2010s had passed.

#### **4.3.3 Improving journalistic practices**

Defining an attack terrorist provides governments with a mandate to counteract. This is why it matters greatly how the media discusses and defines terrorism, to which events the term is linked and whose interpretations the media transmit. The roles and responsibilities found in the analysis suggest that the Finnish media could take a more active role in how terrorism is defined in public discussion. The roles of the reporter and transmitter were most strongly perceived by the interviewed journalists, whereas the roles of the explainer and, most importantly, analyser were discussed more conditionally.

To begin with, the findings of the analysis suggest some concrete proposals for practical news work in terms of the scale, style and technicalities of online news reporting. First, the scale of the reports should be reviewed according to present, verified knowledge and not suspicions or hypotheses of the motives of events. It should be ensured that shattered minute-to-minute follow-up articles include enough context so that the reader is not required to browse through tens of updates. In addition, these sorts of articles should be accompanied by summary articles that provide comprehensive information about the event. Second, for the role of the analyser to actualise, news

work needs to be organised in a manner that provides journalists with time to independently investigate and report about terrorism outside acute events. This way, the editorial practices of the media would increase context instead of adding to the chaos.

As the role of the transmitter illustrates, the initial interpretations about certain events are made by state officials and transmitted almost unchanged by the media. Assuming that the officials are able to make a comprehensive evaluation about the situation, motives and background and pursue the correct criminal offences, this should not be considered an issue. However, previous research has shown how governments and officials, too, may be skewed in their interpretations about which acts of violence qualify as terrorism (Miller & Rizwaar 2011; Norris, Kern & Just 2003; Lewis 2011). Moreover, national terrorist laws differ in their content and have, from time to time, raised questions about their accuracy and usability.

The interviewed journalists discussed terrorism terminology especially in relation to juridical definitions and the judicial process, which need to be treated with particular caution. Given that sources are a significant part of news production during violent conflict and that journalists rely on official interpretations during the early stages of reporting, the media have little leeway to affect the use and spread of juridical definitions of terrorism. Within the media, it might be necessary to consider how different meanings linked to terrorism could be defined and how terrorism as a phenomenon treated without only relying on a purely legal concept. One of the uses of the concept of terrorism is indeed legal, but other conceptualisations and uses remain. As it is, one usually does not find any definitions in news text for what is meant by calling an event terrorist.

One interviewee stated that journalists should not be tied to how terrorism is juridically defined, as depending on the legal system it can take years to reach a final judgment. The interviewees were also unanimous that after the critical hours, days or weeks and with sufficient knowledge about the course of events, background and context, the media can and should review the events and their definitions. As one of the public's prominent sources of information, the media have the status required to start critical discussions about the matter. The interviewees called for active participation in public discussion instead of single opinion pieces that question how a certain act has been defined. On the other hand, it became evident in the interviews that different newsrooms have varying practices for instructing their staff about terrorism reporting and even more versatile guidelines, if any. Considering the self-regulatory structures of the Finnish media, it is ever the

more important that the media and journalists have a shared understanding about terrorism and common ways of treating the subject. This calls for guidelines and terminological accuracy.

Some interviewees suggested that individual media could take the initiative and transparently align and describe their use of terrorism terminology. This suggestion was based on the interviewees' understanding of the media's tendency to review and follow what others do. One clear initiative for guidelines or style guides could spread within the field and result in common and shared practices. Examples about these types of media declarations already exist. For instance, in 2017 the Finnish regional newspaper Aamulehti released a statement that it would aim for gender-inclusive language and replace professional titles that refer to the male gender with gender-neutral alternatives (Aamulehti 2017). As another example, in 2019 the British newspaper the Guardian released a climate pledge to change the way their journalists and editors wrote about the environment (Zeldin-O'Neill 2019). In a glossary explaining the changes, Zeldin-O'Neill (2019) wrote: "Climate change is no longer considered to accurately reflect the seriousness of the overall situation; use climate emergency or climate crisis instead to describe the broader impact of climate change." Instead of the word climate change, the newspaper would use the words climate emergency or climate crisis. Climate sceptic would be replaced with climate denier.

Both of these initiatives are examples of the media's active pursuit to change the way certain phenomena or words are discussed, understood and interpreted in public discussion. They demonstrate an active take by the media on a societal issue that runs deeper than the words we use. Most importantly, the Guardian's style guide can be accessed online by the public and by other media, which provides transparency and the possibility for anyone to find justifications for certain terminology and its use. Commonly known guidelines would provide journalists and editors with an outline for editorial work and ease case-by-case assessment and decision-making. In addition, guidelines would ensure that the quality of reports would not fluctuate depending on which individual is making the call in the newsroom.

Journalists are working under intense pressure to meet the huge information needs of the public in a rapidly changing and complex society. The findings of the analysis suggest that currently few guidelines are at place and editorial considerations are made among a small group, sometimes by the reporter individually. The treatment of events depends on who is working and what their knowledge about the phenomenon is. In addition to guidelines, the editorial staff would benefit from further training and gaining more profound knowledge of the complexity of terrorism and the

history of terror as a strategy. Options for forming guidelines and training are myriad, and it is not in the scope of this thesis to form specific outlines for them.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, I conclude the study by, first, summarising the significance, implications and contributions of this thesis. Second, I acknowledge and discuss some of the limitations of the thesis and, third, provide suggestions for future research.

### **5.1 Contributions of the study**

The aim of this thesis was to gain insight into how journalists perceive the interplay of terrorism and the media in general and their roles and responsibilities in terrorism reporting in particular. The research problem was based on an extensive review of previous terrorism and media research which directed the research approach of this thesis. Previous research largely defines, examines and discusses the interplay of terrorism and the media from the outside. Terrorism reporting and coverage have been studied and criticised from various angles, but a gap remained in the lack of knowledge about the practices, processes and circumstances that lead to finished articles, in other words the journalistic and editorial perspective.

The main contribution of this thesis is the practical, journalistic point of view that it provides. In the form of four roles and three responsibilities, this thesis highlights how a sample of Finnish journalists perceive the media's duties, actions, ideals and realities in reporting terrorism and, therefore, helps understand the dynamics of the editorial process and the complexities of terrorism reporting. Many of the findings of this thesis resonate with previous findings, explain or elaborate them. The interviews with nine Finnish journalists show that the journalists are aware of the issues related to terrorism reporting but do not have the necessary means or mindset to grasp and tackle them. In difficult circumstances, journalists have settled on the complexity of terrorism reporting as unchangeable. The practical contributions of this thesis may help improve journalistic practice and increase the awareness of journalists. To be able to maintain balance and provide context, journalists and the media need sufficient knowledge about terrorism in its complexity, initiatives to define the phenomenon more broadly and coherently, and guidelines to support their practical work.

## 5.2 Limitations of the study

Despite the academic and practical value of this thesis, it does not come without limitations. The first limitation is related to the definitional dispute of the term terrorism and the social constructionist approach of this thesis. Even though this thesis did not aim to use a specific definition of terrorism but instead examined the use of the term, presenting the work of scholars required highlighting some specific definitions. Definitions by other scholars highlighted the aspects that make terrorism and the media intersect on a definitional level, even though no single definition was applied during, for instance, interviews and analysis. The constructionist approach was most fruitful for the research design and aims of this thesis, but understanding terrorism as a social construct is not to say that some agreement on the core elements and boundaries of a terrorism would not exist. However, the social constructionist approach allowed that common debates did not need to be resolved. Settling on a detailed definition would have required deciding, for instance, whether terrorist subjects can be individuals, groups, the state or any of them.

Second, the research material from the rather small sampling of interviewees that represent a limited number of media outlets is inadequate to generalise the findings to all Finnish media. This was overcome by directing the purposes of this thesis to understanding how a sample of professionals interpret and reflect the practice of terrorism reporting. The individual journalists' subjective observations were hoped to provide context and explanations for previous research and, thereby, to deepen and diversify academic knowledge. Moreover, as the interviewees were selected through manual sampling and on a voluntary basis, it is difficult to assess the most qualified potential participants in the Finnish context and whether, for instance, conscious and proactive persons initiated participation. The limited time frame and scope of the thesis did not allow for a pervasive mapping of potential interviewees, especially since there is no centrally gathered information available about the department, expertise or specialisation of individual Finnish journalists. With more time, a wider sample and the inclusion of quantitative methods, this limitation could have been decreased.

Finally, qualitative research methods are always subjective, as assessing the same research material could lead to different interpretations in the hands of another researcher. As journalists cannot completely escape their subjective values in journalistic work, a researcher cannot do so either. As a researcher, I undeniably carry presuppositions, preconceptions and expectations that may have, to some extent, affected the choices made during the research process. For instance, I have a



professional background in journalism and have my own observations and opinions about editorial practices and journalistic work. To some extent I believe this background has been helpful rather than problematic, in positioning and defining the study, in providing interviewing experience and in interview interaction. Throughout the research process, I have remained aware of my own standing to ensure minimal influence.

### **5.3 Implications for further research**

The findings of this thesis imply that an actor-centered approach in terrorism and media research is called for. The journalists' point of view in terrorism reporting provides several opportunities for future research. An evident continuum of this thesis would be to extend the scale of the study to cover a greater number of journalist-interviewees. A significantly larger sample of interviewees would also allow for generalisations and more reliable comparisons to other national contexts. With a slightly more comprehensive sample of media outlets, one could also examine whether the publication type, in other words the financial model, publication pace and style, affect terrorism reporting practices and the perceptions of journalists.

Furthermore, an intriguing option would be to take an ethnographic approach in combining interviews with observation in the newsroom. Ideally, the research process of a case study as such would commence and take place in real time as terrorist events unfold, without an academic delay. In a setting like this, some of the methodological limitations of this thesis could be overcome and perceptions and observations would likely be more detailed and accurate. In addition, editorial practices and the observations of journalists could be compared to the coverage and reports of the specific incident, for instance the frames, discourses or narratives found in the coverage.

The interplay of terrorism and the media is deemed unsolvable and is evidently the topic of many future studies. Therefore, the examples given here are a fraction of the potential research opportunities that terrorism and the media, and more specifically the journalistic and editorial approach to the research problem, have to offer. Understandings of what constitutes terrorism has been seen to move with the times, which is why the uses of the term are telling of the surrounding political, societal and cultural context.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Interview frame

The research material of this thesis was gathered from semi-structured interviews. This interview frame functioned as a rough plan to ensure the comparability of the material collected in individual interviews. Additional or follow-up questions could be made according to the answers of the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, the interviewee's first language. The enclosed interview frame has been translated from Finnish to English by the author.

*Background information: Name, age, work title, employer, working experience in the field*

*How do you define terrorism?*

*What, in your opinion, makes terrorism newsworthy/a significant news topic?*

*Does suspicion of terrorism make a violent event more newsworthy?*

*How would you describe the editorial process in terrorism reporting?*

*Sources*

*Considerations during the process*

*Who defines terrorism*

*The media's role*

*Use of the term*

*External pressure*

*Legal definitions*

*Have there been internal instructions for terrorism reporting?*

*There have been claims about a symbiotic relationship between terrorism and the media, meaning that the media get dramatic stories that sell and terrorists get publicity for their deeds. What do you think about this description?*

*The interviewees own description*

*The media's main task in terrorism reporting*

*There has been discussion about the inconsistent use of the term terrorist both in public discussion and in the media. What kind of thoughts does this raise?*

*The nationality and religion of the perpetrator*

*Target of violence and number of victims*

*Do you think either terrorism reporting or the editorial process behind it has changed?*

*How would you describe the media's responsibility for the perceptions people have for terrorism as a phenomenon and the threat it poses?*

*How, in your opinion, do the media succeed in reporting terrorism?*

*Domestic versus foreign events*

*Usefulness of the term terrorism*

*How, in your opinion, should terrorism be covered?*

*Visibility given to perpetrators/acts of violence*

## Appendix 2 Consent form

In accordance with research ethics, the interviewees of this thesis were presented with the enclosed consent form, designed to inform about the use and preservation of the research material. The consent form was presented to the interviewees in Finnish, their first language. The enclosed example of the consent form has been translated from Finnish to English by the author.

*Written consent to participate in the study*

*I am participating in a research interview used in Saara Tammi's Master's thesis. I have received information about the study in advance, and I have been informed about the reasons the material is collected for. I have the right to receive further information about the study.*

*The research will be conducted and findings reported in a confidential manner. The interviewee's personal information will only be known to the researcher. The interview material will be handled and conserved confidentially. The results and findings are published in the thesis in such a way that no individual can be identified.*

*The content of the research interview is used only as material for Saara Tammi's Master's thesis. Upon completion of the study, the interview recording and material will be properly disposed of. I consent to the conduct of the research interview, to the recording of the interview and to the use of the interview material as research material.*

*Time and place*

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*The signature of the participant*

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*Printed name*

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